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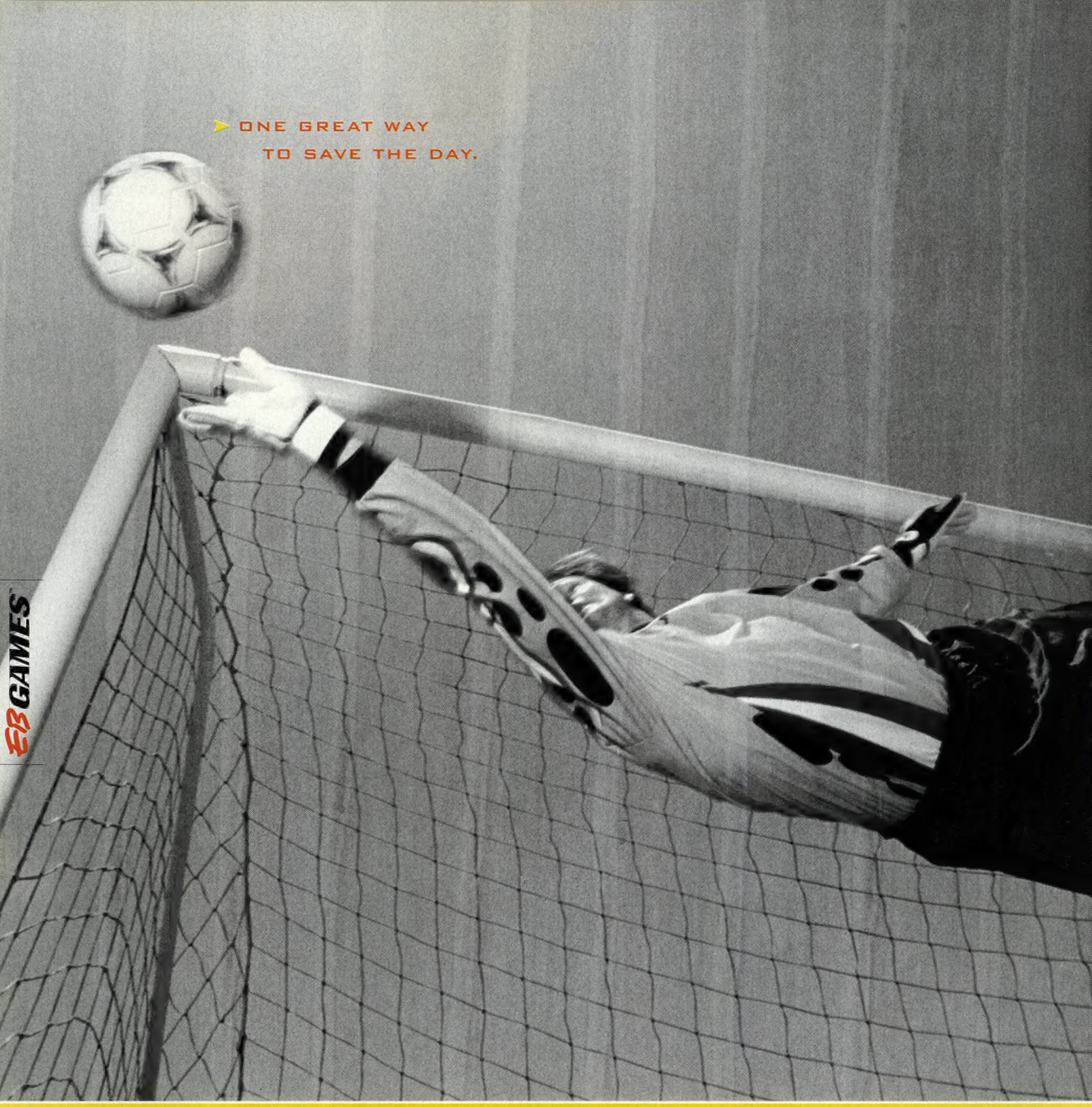

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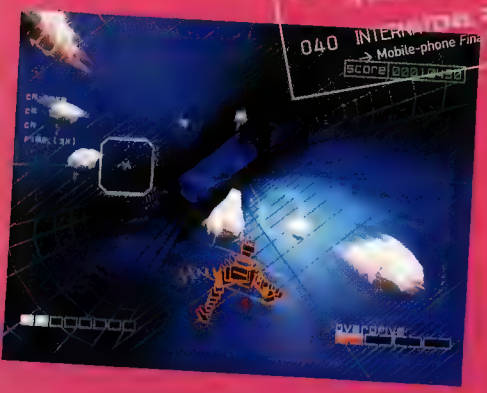

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GET MORE FROM YOUR GAMES

Milky, Christian, and I recently returned from the Tokyo Game Show, and what a blast it was. Japan is a gamer's paradise, and TGS is awesome and peculiar at the same time. Awesome because we had a lot of hands-on time with the PSP (*Vampire Chronicles: The Chaos Tower* was the shizznit) and saw games like *Tekken 5* and *Okami*. Peculiar because of the all the cosplayers running around (Chun-Li seemed to be the most popular), and because Nintendo was a no-show and there were no DS units or games. Weird. Our special TGS report starts on page 24.

Many of you wondered what happened to the Game Advisor. [illegible] like a thousand years old after all—but through [illegible] may not be all there. Uh, welcome back, Mr. Geezer.

Believe it: Sports is the top genre in gaming. [illegible] page 12, where the new section Athletic Support covers it all: news, interviews, [illegible] national to the extreme—with a little racing thrown in for good measure. Booyah!

Thanks to all the gr8 gamers who sent in their pics proving they do indeed exist. [illegible] Peanut has turned into a crystal-clear indication that [illegible] OK, y'all be thankful in this thanking time of year.

_Tom Byron, Editor-in-Chief

WHAT WE ARE THANKFUL FOR

Thanksgiving is nearly upon us, and to ensure that we don't get completely lost in the holiday hustle 'n' bustle that's seemingly always focused on what we want, it's a good time to pause and reflect on what we have. In the interest of originality, we have disqualified the obvious defaults: The Lord Almighty, family, friends, good health, the armed forces, and Oberto Peppered Beef Jerky. Now get to thankin'.

TOM BYRON EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

GMR, the *GMR* staff, the airplane, RPGs on the GBA (where they should be), Christian in Japan, girl gamers (yes, you exist and you are totally awesome), Detroit at 2-1, the PSP and the DS, California, forks, Peter Jackson, C.C. Lemon, readers like you.

JAMES MIELKE EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Gloomy Bear, The Roundabouts, Zhang Ziyi, Monica Bellucci, Sade, Scarlett Johansson, Janet Jackson, Hawaii, *Nausicaa*, *Porco Rosso*, gryphons, mysterious bags, ferrets, French bulldogs, Gucci, Prada, gyoza, New York City, Tokyo, 2D games, and Technics 1200s.

CARRIE SHEPHERD MANAGING EDITOR

Servile plant life, smiling drums, dogs that have flowers for girlfriends, raccoon shopkeepers, reality TV, wireless Internet access, goat cheese, Japanese tchotchkes, *DDR*, XM Radio, sunny dispositions, writers who meet deadlines, reader correspondence, and, of course, *GMR*.

ANDREW PFISTER ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Invisible mode on AIM, a healthy Brett Favre, Pacific Coast Highway, Lisa Hannigan's voice, animals that put their paws over their eyes as if we can't see them, the D-A-G chord progression, Oberto Teriyaki Beef Jerky, VH1 Classic, Coen brothers movies, and the moon.

CHRISTIAN NUTT ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Sushi Nozawa, 16-bit games, carnitas, Patrick Wolf's *Lycanthropy*, karaoke, Studio GAINAX, Diana Wynne Jones, the RPG genre, and being fortunate enough to get paid for doing two of the things I love the most: gaming and writing.

GERRY SERRANO ART DIRECTOR

The color blue, Mission burritos at midnight, damn fine whiskey anytime, Nicole Kidman, *The Sopranos*, bright sunny days that make you believe in better tomorrows, parking spots in San Francisco, good hikes, Tom Waits, and Frank Sinatra's "In the Wee Small Hours."

CAROLINE KING - DESIGNER

Brownie corner pieces, her KitchenAid mixer, naps, hot chocolate, Mos Def, iTunes, her iPod, purses, free stuff, breakdancers and dance-off-themed movies, her entourage, and the ability to eat seemingly endless quantities of pecan pie.

art by: Oscar Charla

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POST

WE IRRITATED SO MANY PEOPLE THIS MONTH, WE HAD TO ADD AN EXTRA PAGE

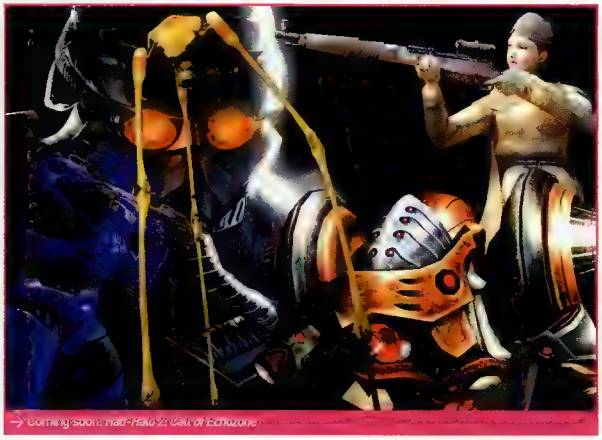
→ Last issue, *GMR* reviewed *Paper Mario: The Thousand Year Door*. Judging by the complete lack of feedback, we can only assume you agreed with our review 100 percent. Or you were too busy writing about why Game Geezer went missing again. To be honest, he has not been well....

BANG, BANG

Obviously, everyone should be aware of this, most especially my dearest friends, the journalists, but just to get it out in the open, so the entire consumer body knows, we are at the start of the biggest shooter war of all time.

Coming out between September and December are *Halo 2, Killzone, Star Wars Battlefront, Star Wars Republic Commando,* and *Call of Duty: Finest Hour*—just to name a few. Essentially, these games each represent an "electoral vote" for the consoles they are for. A few can be purchased for either console, but there, the more popular of the two is all the more noticeable. In case you can't tell, all these games are for either the Xbox or the PlayStation 2. And that says something about consoles' genres, but I digress.

The point is, for the many gamers who own both an Xbox and a PlayStation 2, this can be an opportunity to show your support for a specific console. I'm in consumer ed. this year (senior year, high school), and we've been learning about how consumers have control over the market, beyond what they may think. You have power, similar to the power to vote.



→ Coming soon: Halo 2, Call of Killzone

By buying only the shooters for one of these consoles, you're telling game publishers that their shooters are popular, triggering more of those shooters to be published. This means more money for the game developers and more power for that console. I understand that it can feel like there are gazillions of developers out there, but you'd be shocked at how important each can be to a console. It's all up to you. Make a careful, educated choice. Think about what developer, publisher, and, most important, console you are supporting with each purchase.

This is your chance to speak out about where you want the shooter genre to go. Choose your words wisely.

_David of New Trier

GETTING IN THE GAME

I would like to ask if there's any way a kid like me could submit videogame ideas to a publisher or design company. Any info that you could give me would be greatly appreciated.

_Eric B.

Our advice to any person of youth with starry-eyed development dreams is as follows: Keep it to yourself. Let it percolate in your mind for a few years, allow it to grow, adapt, breathe. Write everything down, no matter how silly or illogical it might seem at the time. Keep playing games, new and old, and learn from people who come before you. As you get older, start to learn how the industry works, and if by then you're still interested in game design as a career, make good use of your post-high-school education. Then, when you're ready to try to break in, you'll be armed with knowledge, experience, and fully developed concepts. Also, learn to love working 100-hour weeks and ignoring jaded magazine reviewers. ↳

GMR Labs is pleased to announce that message-board postings at gmr.1UP.com have seen an astonishing 0.4 percent increase in awesomeness over the past three months, no doubt spurred by the critically acclaimed and environmentally friendly Awesomeotron 6000. This month, the A6000 randomly generated this question: The Nintendo DS: Nov. 21, $149, Metroid Hunters *demo pack-in...are you in or out?*

I am so in, so far you'll never find me.
_ViewtifulSean

It sounds good, too good almost. Anyway, I probably won't get it unless it's given to me as a gift; I have enough October and November games on my mind. I'll spend the $150 on console games I already have...
_atomic_gerbil

Geh...another freakin' handheld? Geez, I just got an NES-itavored SP like three months ago, and that put me in the hole $100. So as far as I'm concerned, I'm out like a fat kid trying to steal third base. I'd rather spend my money on GAMES like *Fable, Metal Gear Solid 3, Burnout 3, Halo 2, Grand Theft Auto 4, Def Jam Fight for NY, Battlefront, Iron Phoenix, Killzone, S.T.A.L.K.E.R., Prince of Persia 2,* etc., etc....
_Erik Waters

I have been waiting for the DS ever since it was announced; now this just makes me want to get it even more.
_n3s_th3_n00b

I am so out. It's not that I don't want a DS. It's that by November 21, I'll be too busy with the big holiday releases and too broke. ↳

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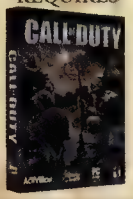

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→ Fable: Sure, it's a great game with plenty to enjoy, but can't do your taxes? We thought not. 8/10.

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WE SAID WHAT NOW?

Reading the October issue, while looking at the awesome number of Xbox releases this month, I was reading the *Fable* article, and low and behold you guys have done it again. You all have been hyping *Fable* since February 1886, saying this game would surpass the invention of the automobile and the phone. Now on the verge of its release, your article tries to tell me that the controls are "clunky" and the opening tutorial bits are boring with narration. And at the end, on your "patented" scoring system, under "not as good as," you write "as it could be." Why don't you let a game be a game?

_Frank Acosta

Here at *GMR*, we always try to temper our enthusiasm in an effort to avoid the runaway hype you mention. If we ever went overboard with anticipatory hype for *Fable*, then we apologize. But we're pretty sure that we haven't. For example, we do not recall ever writing that *Fable* will "surpass the invention of the automobile." Perhaps you are confusing that with our preview of *Cabela's Big Game Hunter 2005*, in which we proclaimed that "this game will make you renounce all worldly possessions, murder your family, and attempt to jump the Grand Canyon in the mistaken belief that you are an automobile." And on two of those three counts, we were eventually vindicated.

GETTING IT

I'd like to give a big "thank you" to Andrew Pfister for his remarks on *The Guy Game* in the October issue. As a lesbian gamer, one can imagine that it is rather trying for me to see games like these exist at all, but just in naming the groups that it alienates is (unfortunately for the medium) rising far above most game reviews. Also impressive is the reference to drilling in "even further the stereotype that...young men should behave...badly." Thanks for a more open-minded approach; it is greatly appreciated.

_Katy Johnson

NOT GETTING IT

I've always enjoyed *GMR*. In fact, there was a time not too long ago when I would read it and then I'd let my 9- and 11-year-old kids read the magazine too. But lately, they haven't been allowed to look through the magazine without supervision.

Between the constant sexual innuendo, raunchy language, and inappropriate images, I'm ready to let my subscription expire and try a new gamer magazine.

_Patricia Voigt

No offense intended, Ms. Voigt, but we don't make *GMR* with 9- and 11-year-olds in mind. The average age of our readers is 21, and we believe that most of them are capable of handling pictures of pretty girls in swimsuits and the occasional "ass" or "damn" that makes it into the magazine (though we do try to keep the potty-mouthing to a minimum). But it is your money, and we wish you well.

DON'T YOU FORGET ABOUT ME

There are way too many games coming out this holiday season, and inevitably many of them that are deserving of great things will end up like *Beyond Good & Evil* did last winter. You guys (and girls) at *GMR* have been doing a great job giving ample publicity to deserving games like *Shin Megami Tensei: Nocturne, Digital Devil Saga, Katamari Damacy, Prince of Persia 2, The Bard's Tale, Otogi 2,* and *Suikoden IV.*

_Ben Fichera

Good news, Ben Fichera and other Fichera-minded individuals: We continue the pimpage of undernoticed games this issue in our "10 Season Sleepers" feature story on page 84. In our view, there's plenty of room in this world, and for that matter, in game magazines, for both *Halo 2* and *Taiko: Drum Master*. Though at this point it seems inevitable that another *Beyond Good & Evil* sales disaster is going to happen. When will those wacky publishers learn?

UNCLE SAM'S KIDS

I think you missed the point in your response to JB's letter in your October issue. He was not objecting to the military recruiting but to the recruiting efforts being aimed at children. While recruiting is a necessary function of the military, I do find it rather disingenuous to see the likes of Joe Lieberman decrying violent videogames while tax dollars are being used to make such games recruiting tools that are directed largely at children. Recruiting children is behavior I'd expect from the warlords of some third-world militia, not the United States military.

_EW

We agree in principle, but as previously mentioned, *GMR*'s average reader is 21. None of the ads in question appear to specifically target (if you'll pardon the choice of word) readers under 16 years of age, so it all depends on what age you define "children" to be.

because of them. I reckon I'll hold off on the DS for at least a couple of months.
_Kris_P

I'm totally out. I think of the GBA SP as being in its prime; to me the system is far from dead, even if I don't play it that much. So I really don't see the need for the DS right now, and I'm not sure about the whole touch-screen thing.
_Quezacoll

I'm actually gonna wait till Nintendo releases different colors for the DS...unless the launch titles are impressive.
_darth007

Quote of the Month:
I am most definitely in. Any console that allows me to send doodles of a penis to my friends is a steal at $149.
_DQ

SIGH

Not only am I a "chick" who plays games, I'll do you one better. I work at EB Games. I spend most of my free time playing videogames or watching G4TechTV. I'm also currently working on designing a line of gaming T-shirts.

I love all games, mostly those on GC, GBA, and PC. I also love the classics like the NES 8-bit, and I still own a WORKING Atari 2600. My favorite game genres are RPG, action, RTS, and racing. Favorite games of mine include *Age of Mythology*, *Diablo II*, *Pikmin 2*, *NFSU*, *Crystal Chronicles*, and any of the *Zelda* games.

I get excited about new releases and often have them preordered AND pick them up the first day of release. I'm willing to try any game. And while I know I'm not the best gamer, I'm willing to challenge anyone who questions my abilities. Some also laugh when I pull my GBA SP out of my purse. The system goes everywhere with me, and I often spend my lunch breaks playing games.

And while my boyfriend is also a gamer, if we were at E3, he'd be holding MY purse while I'd be trying the new games. That or we'd be fighting over the controllers. Point is, girls do play videogames. If you keep your eyes open, you will find us.

_Emily

→ Obviously, not representative of female gamers at large.

I posted your request for pictures to the LiveJournal girl gamer community, and after reading what everyone had to say about your idiotic demand that girls prove they game, I decided to send you a link to the community so you can go there and read for yourself what girls think of you and your request.

If guys would stop trying to "impress" girls with their prowess at games and actually play a game with us, I think most guys would find out that their girl is a gamer, and since she likes you, she will probably like the game you like. It's called "having things in common." Most guys seem to like the idea that I game and make comments like "I wish my girl did."

I hope this inspires you to stop with the "girls don't game" crap, but I doubt it will.

_Amy-Elyse

Due to the accidental violation of our self-imposed ban on gender-issue letters, we got a lot of responses this month to last issue's open request for "proof that girl gamers exist." In actuality, this was little more than an awkwardly worded attempt at promoting and encouraging this demographic and not, contrary to what some letter writers suggested, an attempt at obtaining photographs for...unsavory purposes. We apologize for the confusion and encourage everyone to check out Amy-Elyse's community at www.livejournal.com/community/girlgamers/. And for the last time, that Seanbaby joke in *GMR* #19 was just that. A joke. Between the male ass cleavage and the mullet from the future, we'd say the girls had it easy.

UNEDITED LETTER OF THE MONTH

i just sat down with my October gmr and after reading your review of the guy game i got so excited i had to write.i wasn't sure what gmr stood for but now i know it's gamers morality review. i can't wait for you guys to say more about immorality of the graphic violence and extreme gore in some games.NOT!!!!!!!!!. that review was the pinnacle of hypocrisy, come on if you want want to preach morals get ordained and find a church. if the game sucked it sucked but i want to know why (and not because boobs are childish)

_big James

p.s.dear Andrew you should go strait home and get into your wife's/girlfriends/moms purse and retrieve your testicles, to print this would take balls so if you do I'll know you took my advice

***The Guy Game* "sucked" because it wasn't so much a game as it was memorizing what button made the girlies take off their clothes. Regardless, *The Guy Game* was reviewed as an overall package, and the gratuitous stupidity of it all rendered whatever game mechanics it had irrelevant. And actually, Andrew is an ordained minister of The Church of Proper Writing and Coherent Thought. Rest assured, he and his reproductive parts are praying for your salvation.**

→ Have you heard the good news?

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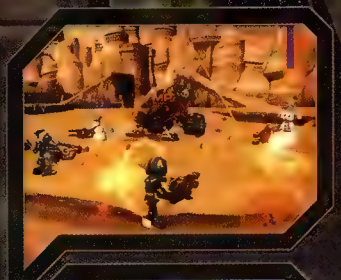
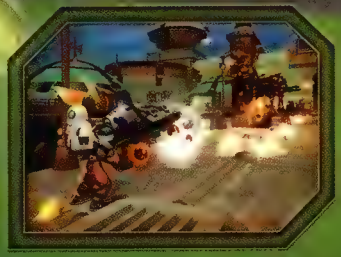
Ratchet & Clank are going online and they're ready to take on the universe!





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PlayStation 2

INSOMNIAC

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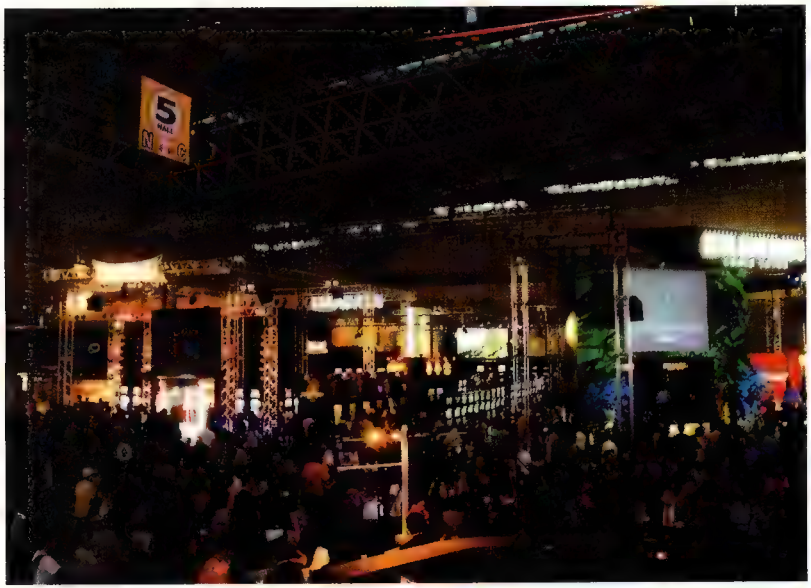
FRONT

GMR NEWS NETWORK

IN THE NEWS



→ As in the States, the latest *Metal Gear Solid 3* trailer resulted in huge crowds in front of Konami's booth.

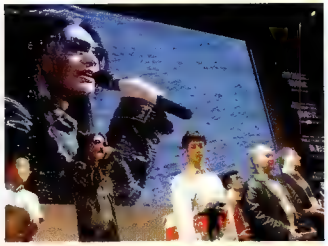
[BEATDOWN TIME] MASTER NINJA

Tecmo, Team Ninja, and Microsoft gathered the world's top *Ninja Gaiden* players together at Microsoft's massive TGS booth for the worldwide conclusion of the online Master Ninja Tournament.

The event pitted five of the best from the United States, Canada, Scotland, and Japan in a special series of insane boss fights to see who is the world's supreme *Ninja Gaiden* player. They filed in for a righteous beating as delivered by the downloadable *Hurricane Pack 2*'s evil new bosses.

Despite being the last player to make it to the final stage, the quiet Yasunori Otsuka was the first to beat the final whip-armed boss-lady. His karma total by game's end—some players didn't even finish—was well into the 700K realm, making him the clear victor, beating out Canada's Derek "Snapdragon" Kisman.

If you'd like to test your mettle against the new foes, *Hurricane Pack 2* is available for download now on Xbox Live. Just don't entertain any illusions of competing with these best-of-the-best warriors.



TOKYO GAME SHOW 2004

BIGGER AND BETTER THAN IT'S BEEN IN YEARS

JAPAN

The biggest Tokyo Game Show in years has come and gone. Biggest not only literally, as it was the most popular of the past five years, but also figuratively, as the playable debut of Sony's new handheld gaming system, the PSP, made it exceptional.

Unlike the U.S.-based E3 show, TGS lets average-Joe gamers attend. They did in droves, and it seemed like most of them set up camp in front of Square Enix's video screen. It became clear that with its strongest lineup ever—as either a separate or joined entity—Square Enix can do no wrong in the eyes of the Japanese. Titles like *Dragon Quest VIII* (see page 27), *Kingdom Hearts II*, *Radiata Stories* (from the maker of *Star Ocean: Till the End of Time*), and *Final Fantasy XII*—plus many more—captivated the masses. Square is back on top.

Of course, the PSP was another huge attraction. Planning to showcase games in a private event, Nintendo kept the floor free of DS games—even restricting third parties, resulting in an all clear for Sony. Its booth's huge PSP area provided a great forum to test its games; check out our special report on page 28 for the full scoop. Japanese gamers were eager to get their hands on the unit, with lines forming for popular titles.

As in the United States, Japan is currently experiencing a crush of new massively multiplayer games. Square Enix was showcasing three, NCsoft was pushing *Lineage II* hard, and many lesser-known companies were also giving the genre a stab.

Mobile gaming is also really starting to take off. Square Enix had its first original mobile game, *Final Fantasy VII: Before Crisis* (see page 40). NTT DoCoMo, the country's most popular carrier, had a booth showcasing an array of other titles, including Konami's *Metal Gear* and Atlus' *Megami Tensei*.

If one thing's becoming clear, it's that Japanese developers are stuck in a rut as the PS2 moves into its fifth year. The system was overloaded with all-too-familiar action games; while many of them look interesting—Sony's *Genji* for its polish, Konami's *Oz* for its outlandish combo attacks and cool characters—the genre is close to played out. We left the show with the overwhelming feeling that it's time for a shakeup in the industry. We just hope that it won't take until the next console cycle to bring it.

GET SHRUNK

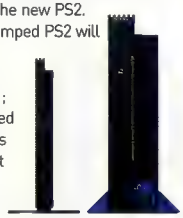
SONY MAKES PS2 TINY

U.S.A.

Sony revealed a little surprise at the Tokyo Game Show—"little" being the key word. Its tiny revamped PS2 is just a bit bigger than a hardcover book, weighing about 2 pounds—45 percent the weight of the old-school PS2 and much smaller. It's shown here next to the old model for comparison.

The new PS2 is also equipped with integrated Ethernet and modem ports for online gaming, just in time for the 120 online PS2 games Sony says will be available during the year-end peak shopping season. The new PS2 is not compatible with Sony's HDD, however, which is necessary for *Final Fantasy XI*. The company released a statement saying it is looking into other memory options for the new PS2.

The revamped PS2 will be in U.S. stores by November 1; the suggested retail price is $149.99, just like the original.



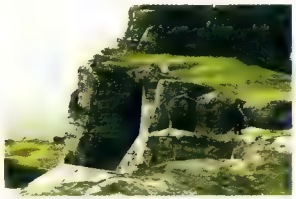
IT'S NOT ICO 2

BUT WE'RE THRILLED ANYWAY

JAPAN

Sony revealed the newest game from the team responsible for *Ico* at the Tokyo Game Show. Entitled *Wanda to Kyouzou*, it pits you against massive foes.

Kyouzou is Japanese for "colossus," and the video at TGS showed the hero struggling to fight these behemoths. No word on a U.S. release just yet.



GAMEPORT VITAL GAME INFO. NOW BOARDING...

ARRIVALS COMING SOON

SYSTEM	ETA	TITLE	HOW HOT?
XB	NOV	**HALO 2** If we had more than five little flames....	🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥
PS2	NOV	**METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SNAKE EATER** Nothing's cooler than the Cold War, apparently.	🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥
PC	NOV	**EVERQUEST II** Sony Online prepares to suck the life out of its fans.	🔥🔥🔥🔥
PS2	DEC	**GRAN TURISMO 4** They scrapped the online. What!?	🔥🔥🔥🔥
GC	DEC	**MARIO PARTY 6** A Nintendo game with sequels out the wazoo? Strange.	🔥🔥
PC/XB	DEC	**STAR WARS: KOTOR II—THE SITH LORDS** The Old Republic reignites.	🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥
PS2/XB	DEC	**SUPER MONKEY BALL DX** Finally, Xbox and PS2 owners get to monkey around.	🔥🔥🔥🔥
XB	DEC	**GUNGRIFFON: ALLIED STRIKE** The best little mech series nobody's played.	🔥🔥🔥
PC/XB	DEC	**CLOSE COMBAT: FIRST TO FIGHT** 2004 is awfully late to be the first to fight, right?	🔥🔥🔥
XB	DEC	**MECHASSAULT 2: LONE WOLF** As if Xbox Live wasn't enticing enough already.	🔥🔥🔥
PS2	DEC	**MEGA MAN X8** Here's hoping Capcom finds the formula once more.	🔥🔥🔥
GBA	DEC	**MARIO PARTY ADVANCE** What took them so long?	🔥🔥🔥
GBA	DEC	**KINGDOM HEARTS: CHAIN OF MEMORIES** Get your Disney on.	🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥
PS2	JAN	**SUIKODEN IV** Try an RPG to ring in the new year.	🔥🔥🔥
PC	JAN	**CITY OF VILLAINS** It's time for revenge.	🔥🔥🔥🔥
PS2/XB	JAN	**MERCENARIES** North Korea will never know what hit it.	🔥🔥🔥

DEPARTURES OUT NOW

SYSTEM	TITLE	GMR SCORE
GC/PS2/XB	**DEF JAM FIGHT FOR NY** Given the dress-up options, we call it *Fashion for NY*.	9/10
GC/PS2/XB	**TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES 2** Konami stomps on our childhood memories.	5/10
GC/PS2/XB	**TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2005** You can count on the Tiger.	9/10
GBA	**ADVANCE GUARDIAN HEROES** Sequels are supposed to be *better* than their predecessors, guys.	6/10
GBA	**MARIO PINBALL LAND** Stick with the *Pokémon* variety of pinball	5/10
GBA	**POKÉMON LEAFGREEN/FIRERED** Remakes prove remarkable.	8/10
GC	**DONKEY KONGA** Don't blame us for your sore hands.	7/10
PS2	**KATAMARI DAMACY** More fun than $20 usually buys.	8/10
PC	**EVIL GENIUS** Turns out it's actually *Evil Person with Above-Average Intelligence*.	6/10
PS2	**SHADOW HEARTS: COVENANT** The best *Final Fantasy*-style RPG Square Enix never made.	8/10
PC/PS2/XB	**STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT** A long time ago fragging a competitor far, far away....	8/10
XB	**OTOGI 2: IMMORTAL WARRIORS** Xbox's action sleeper gets a second shot.	9/10
PS2/XB	**ROBOTECH: INVASION** Maybe FPS wasn't the right move for *Robotech*.	5/10
PS2	**MONSTER HUNTER** You can retire that copy of *Champions of Norrath*.	8/10
PS2	**SLY 2: BAND OF THIEVES** They'll steal your free time.	9/10
GC	**PAPER MARIO: THE THOUSAND-YEAR DOOR** 2004: the year of the GameCube RPG.	9/10

XBOX
KNOWLEDGE
THEY KNOW STUFF SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO!

GREG ORLANDO

XXXBOX

"This is just badly drawn naked ladies saying 's*.'" It took John Byrne, comic writer, author, artist, and loudmouth, to say what was on everybody's mind. American comic books were growing up. Becoming more mature. More adult.**

And now, on Xbox: *Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude* and its bit-player Leopold, the self-pleasuring primate; *Playboy: The Mansion*, with a virtual Hef taking the skin boat to tuna town on a couch; *The Guy Game*, which breaks up its monotonous minigames with boobies and the women who proudly bear them; and *Darkwatch: Curse of the West* with sex scenes.

Comic books, as a medium, stretched to find a new identity. The going was not easy, and the early days of the shift toward a more adult audience were filled with Byrne's cursing, crudely drawn females. For every *Watchmen*, there were five *Cherry Poptarts*. And for every *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, there were 10 *Black Kisses*.

As gamemakers struggle with the definition of adult, I hope they'll discover it means more than bared female mammaries and the F word blurted five times in as many minutes. Right now, it seems it's just naked ladies abusing the English language.

Greg Orlando is an editor at *Xbox Nation*.

FIRST LOOK: DRAGON QUEST VIII

BIG IN JAPAN—AND MAYBE AMERICA, TOO

JAPAN

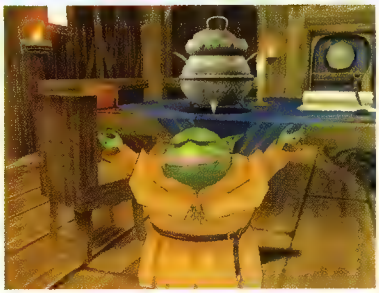
Dragon Quest is one of the most influential videogame series ever created. In 1985, a tiny Japanese PC developer named Enix gambled on the first game. Seven sequels later, the role-playing saga has sold 35 million units worldwide, second only to _Final Fantasy_ in the RPG genre—not bad for a series that does 90 percent of its business in Japan.

The last game, 2000's *Dragon Quest VII* (called *Dragon Warrior VII* over here), sold more than 4 million copies in Japan, making it the top-selling PlayStation title worldwide. So why hasn't anyone outside of Japan played *DQ*? The answer is fairly simple: It has always looked two or three years behind *Final Fantasy* visually, and we missed out on two of the series' biggest games.

Dragon Quest VIII, set to hit Japan on November 27, has a chance to finally change everything. Our Tokyo Game Show session with it confirmed that by modern standards, it's a fairly orthodox RPG: You, as a brave young lad, go on a free-rolling adventure across the medieval landscape, usually with a few wisecracking party members in tow.

The difference here is the graphics. Square Enix has called upon Level 5 (maker of *Dark Cloud 2*) to help create *DQ8*, and the result is a storybook come to life—the game features a vibrant 3D world with weather, passing time, and lovingly detailed animation. The days of blocky villagers walking in place are truly over; in fact, this is the first *Dragon Quest* where the characters actually look like *Dragon Ball* creator Akira Toriyama's original designs.

This new graphical package should attract a whole new crowd to the series, where they'll find some of the most reliable RPG gameplay available today. Despite the supertraditional feel, we discovered that the battle system is remarkably deep—with every victory, your party earns skill points, which are used to raise your proficiency with weapons and magic. Add to this a wealth of items and special skills, and you've got an RPG that could take more than just Japan by storm this time.



→ Look familiar? The series has always featured the art of *Dragon Ball* creator Akira Toriyama, and *DQ8* is no exception.

[BLIPS]

DS launch details

Nintendo's DS will make history as the first Nintendo system to debut outside of Japan. The handheld hits here on November 21 for $149.99 (December 2 in Japan). While the DS will ship with wireless instant-messenger software *PictoChat* and a *Metroid* demo, the launch games had not yet been revealed as this issue went to press. Nintendo is developing 20 titles, along with EA, Activision, and others. The DS also plays GBA titles.

PSP @ TGS

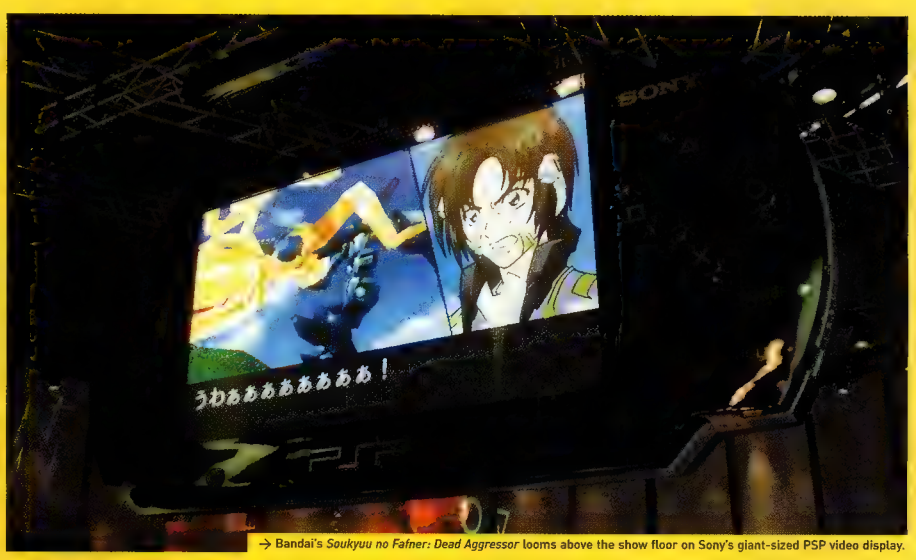
DESPITE A SHAKY LINEUP, SONY'S PORTABLE OWNS TOKYO

JAPAN

For us, the most exciting aspect of the Tokyo Game Show was clearly the PSP, which had many playable games on the show floor. Japanese gamers wouldn't argue much with that assessment, as they flooded into Sony's booth to get their hands on the machine.

The lineup of software was, as we'd expected, somewhat mixed. We played it all, though—what follows are our thoughts on the most interesting PSP titles at the show.

The system itself is as nice as you're hoping. Sure, the analog stick will take some getting used to—it's a tiny nub with limited motion—but the demo units at the show were very well made, the screen was utterly gorgeous and huge, and the games, even in their early state, showcased respectable 3D power. It's clear that the PSP will eventually rise to the top, just like the PlayStation and PS2 before it. 2005 can't come soon enough.



→ Bandai's *Soukyuu no Fafner: Dead Aggressor* looms above the show floor on Sony's giant-sized PSP video display.

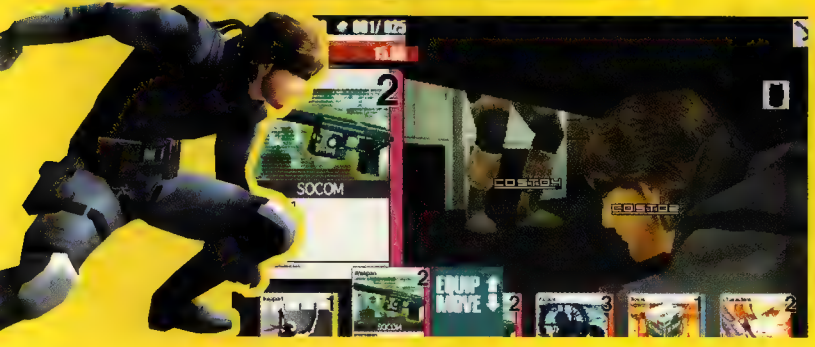
METAL GEAR ACID

IT'LL MAKE YOU GO "!"

You've heard the rumors and waited to hear the truth. Yes, the PSP *Metal Gear* game takes the series in an all-new direction. Yes, it's a card-battle RPG. What!?

As the game's director, Shinta Nojiri, explains, "The fact that it's not an action game is how we're adapting to the handheld system." The concept was designed to make a game that's easy to play on the go—according to Nojiri, action games require too much attention. Taking turns helps with that.

The point can be argued—Nintendo's made a mint on portable action games—but the good news is that *MGA* is surprisingly, well, *solid* for what it is. Stranger things have happened.



→ Left: Check out those cards. No foolin', this isn't the *Metal Gear* you know and love. Above: Yeah, that's right, movement squares à la *Disgaea*. Crazy!

NEW RIDGE RACER

NAMCO

Despite being something of a rehash, *New Ridge Racer* turned out to be one of the most impressive PSP games at the show.

The true content of *New Ridge Racer* is still something of a mystery, but the demo at TGS played beautifully. Featuring an almost perfectly replicated track from PS2's *Ridge Racer V*, the game zoomed, bringing back the feeling of slick speediness the series used to be synonymous with. While the lack of cars in the demo gives a poor indication of how the final game will run, what was there was stupendously playable, and we're hungry for more.

NFS UNDERGROUND RIVALS

ELECTRONIC ARTS

An original game based on the ultrapopular racing series, *NFSU Rivals* features the same stylish action, but the TGS version needed work.

Lagging a bit behind *Ridge Racer* in playability, the "50-percent complete" edition of *Rivals* at TGS looked shaky, although molded in the image of the original series. Colorful lighting, a tricked-out import, and a stylish track were highlights; the control lagged.

VAMPIRE CHRONICLES

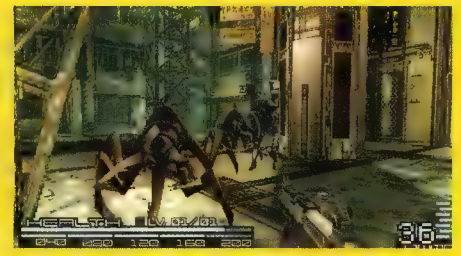
CAPCOM

Resurrecting its most underrated fighting series, Capcom brings *Darkstalkers* to PSP.

Yeah, it might essentially be a port of a Saturn game, but *Vampire Chronicles* shows that the PSP's 2D capabilities are no slouch. The crisp screen also proved well-suited to the series' ultrastylin' character artwork. With the PSP's WiFi capability allowing for two-player action, this rehash transforms into a killer app.

CODED ARMS

KONAMI



If there's one genre that hasn't been decently represented on handhelds before, it's the first-person shooter. It's obvious why. They can't do 3D!

Fortunately, the power of the PSP allows developers to realize their FPS dreams, and *Coded Arms* is an extremely promising start. One of the most attractive playable PSP games at the show, it plunked gamers down into a gritty urban landscape. Chinese signs added flair to the rusty metal and exposed girders everywhere. Using the analog stick to move and the face buttons to aim, *Coded Arms* even controls much like a full-fledged PS2 title. Blowing away spooky spider robots with the R trigger, you'll forget you're playing a handheld title...until a sweaty Japanese man carrying 500 pounds of schwag bumps into you. Well, that was our experience, anyway.

** Note: All games previewed are not confirmed for U.S. release.

HOT SHOTS GOLF

SONY

Showing under its Japanese title, *Minna no Golf Portable*, Sony's popular series cut a figure of reliability next to half-baked titles.

Sony's golf series, which is hugely popular both here and abroad, has been nothing if not predictable. The PSP edition exhibits quality while not shaking the boat too much. With *Tiger* to fight against, that's probably a good move.

THE GAGHARV TRILOGY

BANDAI

RPGs are a particularly nice genre for on-the-go gaming, and Bandai's *The Gagharv Trilogy* should fit the bill with a classic feel.

Based on a series of games developed by Falcom (which is also handling Konami's *Ys: The Ark of Napishtim*), *Gagharv* features 3D maps and 2D characters, recalling PS1 RPGs. Battles are automatic and slightly similar to *Star Ocean*; you control only special attacks.

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR GOLF

ELECTRONIC ARTS

For some reason, EA hid this one behind closed doors, despite the fact that it looked much more complete and felt more playable than *Need for Speed Underground Rivals* did.

Tiger's appearing in fine form on the PSP, with the series' trademark analog swing control replicated effectively by the system's tiny stick. In deference to the PSP's compact screen, the team has also crafted a cool little hideaway HUD that contains vital information about the hole you're on, including its layout and tips. It's clear that EA's serious about maintaining the *Tiger* legacy on PSP.

LUMINES

BANDAI

Tetsuya Mizuguchi, the spacy genius of the game industry responsible for *Rez* (see Retro/Active, page 134), strikes back with his first title after bouncing from Sega.

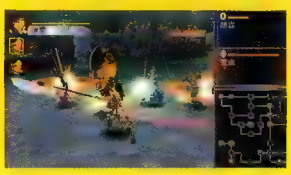
Lumines, befitting the PSP's handheld nature, is a puzzle game. Of course, as the man behind *Rez* would want it, there's also a musical twist; your blocks break on beats. Plug in some headphones and enjoy.

DYNASTY WARRIORS

KOEI

Koei plans to replicate its biggest console success on the PSP. It's doing OK so far.

Dynasty Warriors on PSP has one curious flaw: The action only takes up a portion of the screen, with maps and stats filling up the rest. If you can deal, you'll find that it plays much like its big brothers. It's going to be huge in Japan, but it lacks pizazz.



Help Larry Earn a BA in T&A.

15 hot babes in 17 campus locals.

Dozens of swingin' games like quarters.

Humorous & sexy 3D world.

Over 90,000 words of dialogue.

NINTENDO
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THEY KNOW STUFF SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO!

MARK MACDONALD

FIGHT

Let's face it. When it comes to taking on its console competition, Nintendo is no longer the 300-pound heavyweight world champ it once was.

But when it comes to the portable gaming market, Nintendo isn't afraid to get back into the ring.

First, Nintendo's Reginald Fils-Aime called Sony out in a speech that made it sound like the portable war was already over. "In the next 15 years," he boasted, "just like the last 15, handheld gaming will be known by one name: Nintendo." Body blow!

But wait, it gets better. Without warning, mere hours before a PSP conference, Nintendo announced the DS would sell for $150 on November 21. Sony's news (which lacked a price or release date) was overshadowed by the DS's affordable cost and imminent launch. Uppercut!

The final blow was the seemingly unimportant Japanese date for the DS: December 2. Just so happens that's the day before the tenth anniversary of the PlayStation launch—the date many expected Sony to release the PSP. He's down for the count!

Of course, the real war has yet to begin, but in terms of prebattle maneuvering, you've got to hand it to the Big N's new, aggressive tactics. Nintendo, so far, a winner is you.

Mark MacDonald is executive editor of Electronic Gaming Monthly.

[TALENT]

SHINTA NOJIRI

METAL GEAR ACID'S DEALER

***Metal Gear Acid* was the most proficient PSP game at TGS and, thanks to its departure from the *Metal Gear* formula, the most confusing. Ever since E3, we've been wondering what's up with its focus on card-based gameplay. Fortunately, director Shinta Nojiri shed some light on the subject.**

GMR: What do you think of the PSP platform, in terms of making games?

SN: It's a great machine in terms of meeting our expectations when trying to do something new.

GMR: Is developing for PSP very different from PS2?

SN: I guess at the conceptual level it's very different because with a handheld game, you want to pick it up, play it for maybe 15 minutes, and put it down.

That's why I came up with this game plan. It's mission based. Each mission is about 15 minutes. You don't want an ongoing story that goes on forever in one big mission, like *MGS2* or *3*.

But I guess in terms of developing a game, it's really like creating a game for the PS2 because the PSP is a very high-quality system.

GMR: Where did the idea for a card-based game come from?

SN: I personally wanted to do something totally different and totally new, and so did Hideo Kojima, so I came up with the game plan for this kind of game and presented it to him, and he approved it.

GMR: A lot of *Metal Gear* is based on the freedom to approach situations the way that you want. How difficult was it to apply that to the card-based system?

SN: I guess the area in which you find the most freedom in *MGA* is when you assemble your deck of cards. It's about selecting the cards based on what you want to do. I guess when I came up with the gameplay, my priority was to give as much freedom as possible when customizing Solid Snake, which involves using the cards.

GMR: How much freedom do you have in creating the story or new mechanics not found in other *MGS* games?

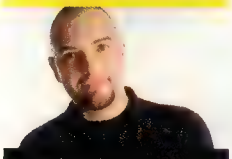
SN: I worked on previous *MGS* games, so I think I know what *MGS* is all about. So even if I do think freely, I can still execute that freedom within the *MGS* world. When we come up with the scenario and game system, I always consult Mr. Kojima. We communicate all the time and I get his advice and approval.

GMR: Is there any sort of worry that this game might alienate fans of the traditional *MGS* games?

SN: One thing we do not want to do is fool the fans, so we're not trying to hide the fact that it's a card-based game. We're going to be very open about it. If fans want to play *Metal Gear* in an action style, *MGS3* is coming out pretty soon, so they can buy that. People who are willing to take on a new challenge and see *Metal Gear* in a new form can buy this. If people buy this game, we're sure that they'll enjoy it.

→ Nojiri, left, readies an *MGA* video for *GMR* at TGS.

PLAYSTATION
KNOWLEDGE
THEY KNOW STUFF SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO!



JOHN DAVISON

HARDCORE?

"Consumers who want and use the Hard Disk Drive are typically the more 'hardcore' gamers, and with more than 27 million PlayStation 2 units already sold in North America, we feel [they] already have their PlayStation 2 units," Sony's recent statement on the supermodelesque redesigned PS2 reads.

So there you have it. Sony says you're not hardcore if you don't have a PS2 already and is presumably declaring that no one who *isn't* hardcore right now is likely *become* hardcore in the imminent future.

If you're new to the PS2, slow down there, cowboy! Sony doesn't want you getting into it *too* much! In the meantime, all of us *real* hardcore owners are hearing our PS2s make funny noises, and as a result, we're eyeing that new slim hotness.

PS2s don't last forever, and given the amount of time hardcore gamers who bought the HDD spend playing *Final Fantasy XI*, guess whose PS2s are likely to break down first?

What are they supposed to do then? Does Sony's statement that "we are also looking into other memory options that would be compatible with the new PS2" mean the company will have a contingency plan for *FFXI* gamers with busted systems? Or are we going to be forced to fend for ourselves?

John Davison is editor-in-chief of the Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine.

[BLIPS]

Go, girl!

In a quest to entice more women to the game industry, WomenGamers.com and the Guildhall at Southern Methodist University have designed a scholarship for women. The money, of course, will help female students pay for the Guildhall's 18-month digital games education program. Awards will be given beginning in January 2005; apply at www.womengamers.com or http://guildhall.smu.edu.

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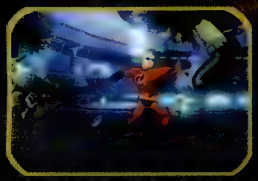
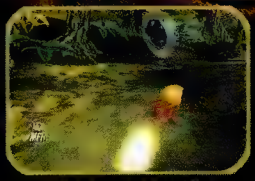
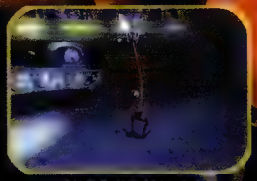


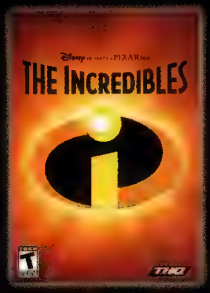
Use your super strength to survive an onslaught of enemies as Mr. Incredible



Use your super speed to run for your life as Dash



Stretch your powers to the limit as Mrs. Incredible



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TEEN T — Cartoon Violence — CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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PC
KNOWLEDGE
THEY KNOW STUFF SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO!

JEFF GREEN

BYE, WIRES

The whole world is going wireless, and, for that, let's all raise our fists in the air Metallica style and say, "RAWK!" At work and at home I am now equipped with a wireless mouse and keyboard, giving me two fewer cords upon which to trip and break my freakin' neck.

More crucially, however, the Internet itself is untethering itself from those pesky wires. And it's nothing short of a revolution. I set up a wireless network at my home, enabling my wife and I to use our laptops to connect to the Web from anywhere in the house—and I will never, ever go back. Some cities, like Philadelphia, are beginning to experiment with free wireless access for everyone—which no doubt will piss off the service providers but is now looking like the obvious, inevitable way this was always meant to be. The genie is out of the bottle. Free Internet for everyone, all the time.

For PC gamers, the implications are huge as gaming becomes increasingly more portable. LAN parties are easier to set up than ever before. You can take those online RPGs and fragfests on the road with you now—or at least out into the living room or the patio with the rest of your family. PC gaming: not just for your mom's basement anymore.

Yay!

GMR CHARTS

IN ASSOCIATION WITH EB GAMES electronics boutique

TOP-SELLING GAMES FOR EVERY SYSTEM FOR SEPTEMBER '04

TOP 10 ALL FORMATS

RANK	TITLE	FORMAT	SCORE
01	FABLE Good or evil? Lots of both.	XB	8
02	POKÉMON FIRERED Nintendo's money-printing license is renewed.	GBA	8
03	STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT Action figures on steroids.	XB	8
04	POKÉMON LEAFGREEN *Green* is the new *Blue*.	GBA	8
05	NBA LIVE 2005 Done with *Madden*? Move to *Live*.	PS2	8
06	THE SIMS 2 Lead another life.	PC	10
07	STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT Blowing up Republic booty.	PS2	8
08	BURNOUT 3: TAKEDOWN Road rage is so sweet.	XB	9
09	STAR OCEAN: TILL THE END OF TIME If not till the end of time, it'll last till the next RPG hits, anyway.	PS2	7
10	TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2005 Count on golf's leading man to deliver.	PS2	9

PS2 TOP 10

01	NBA LIVE 2005	8
02	STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT	8
03	STAR OCEAN: TILL THE END OF TIME	7
04	TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2005	9
05	DEF JAM: FIGHT FOR NY	9
06	MADDEN NFL 2005	9
07	BURNOUT 3: TAKEDOWN	9
08	X-MEN LEGENDS	8
09	SHELLSHOCK: NAM '67	5
10	ESPN NFL 2K5	8

XBOX TOP 10

01	FABLE	8
02	STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT	8
03	BURNOUT 3: TAKEDOWN	9
04	NBA LIVE 2005	8
05	ESPN NBA 2K5	8
06	X-MEN LEGENDS	8
07	TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2005	9
08	DEF JAM: FIGHT FOR NY	9
09	ESPN NFL 2K5	8
10	SHELLSHOCK: NAM '67	5

PC TOP 10

01	THE SIMS 2	10
02	ROME: TOTAL WAR	9
03	CALL OF DUTY: UNITED OFFENSIVE	8
04	FINAL FANTASY: CHAINS OF PROMATHIA	TBD
05	STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT	8
06	WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR	8
07	EVERQUEST: OMENS OF WAR	NR
08	MADDEN NFL 2005	9
09	DOOM 3	8
10	CALL OF DUTY	7

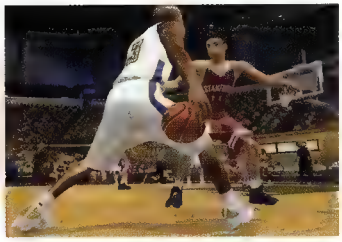
GBA TOP 10

01	POKÉMON FIRERED	8
02	POKEMON LEAFGREEN	8
03	DRAGON BALL Z: SOUL'S FURY	NR
04	SUPER MARIO ADVANCE 4: SUPER MARIO BROS. 3	9
05	YU-GI-OH! RESHEF OF DESTRUCTION	NR
06	MARIO VS. DONKEY KONG	7
07	POWER RANGERS: DINO THUNDER	NR
08	SONIC ADVANCE 3	8
09	STAR WARS TRILOGY APPRENTICE OF THE FORCE	NR
10	SPIDER-MAN 2	NR

GC TOP 10

01	PIKMIN 2	8
02	WWE DAY OF RECKONING	NR
03	DONKEY KONGA	7
04	X-MEN LEGENDS	8
05	ZOIDS: BATTLE LEGENDS	NR
06	DEF JAM: FIGHT FOR NY	9
07	TALES OF SYMPHONIA	8
08	MEGA MAN X: COMMAND MISSION	7
09	MADDEN NFL 2005	9
10	NBA LIVE 2005	8

Tournament tested.



ESPN College Hoops 2K5 is everything you love about college basketball. Navigate a top 10 program through a brutal conference schedule or help Cinderella bust a bracket or two in the NCAA tourney. Coaching decisions, team chemistry and individual talent all factor into your run at the championship, so get ready for the *real* stuff. Nobody delivers the look, feel, passion and pageantry of NCAA basketball like ESPN. Are you ready for the Big Dance?

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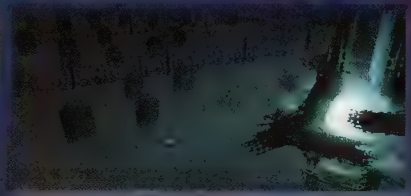
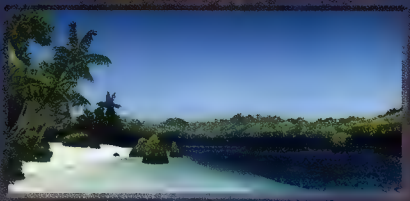
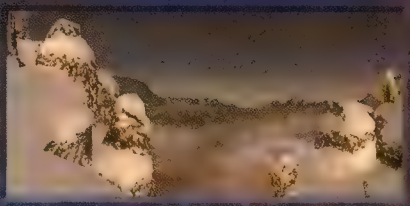
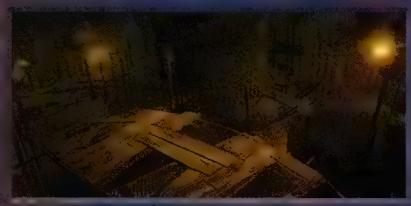


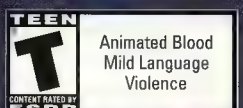


The world of Vana'diel gets even bigger with this FINAL FANTASY XI expansion pack, featuring massive new regions to explore, frightening new enemies to engage, and an unfolding mystery to confront.





PlayStation 2



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WHAT'S HOT? GMR PRESENTS EB GAMES' BEST DEALS

TOP 5 PRE-ORDERS

RANK	TITLE	FORMAT
01	HALO 2 Lenticular trading card	XB
02	GRAN TURISMO 4	PS2
03	NINTENDO DS	DS
04	HALF-LIFE 2	PC
05	EVERQUEST II Starter kit with character-creation tool, item, and behind-the-scenes info	PC

CURRENT PRE-ORDER DEALS

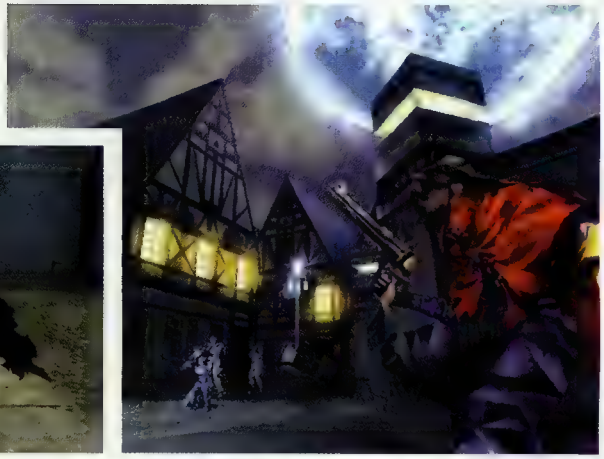
TITLE	FORMAT	DATE
NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND 2 Cheat code for extra $100 in-game	GC/PC/PS2/XB	11/2
HALO 2 Lenticular trading card	XB	11/9
MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT Demo disc	PC	11/10
EVERQUEST II Starter kit with character-creation tool, item, and behind-the-scenes info	PC	11/16
LORD OF THE RINGS: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH Bonus CD	PC	11/16
CALL OF DUTY: FINEST HOUR Bonus American GI figure	GC/PS2/XB	11/16
METROID PRIME 2: ECHOES T-shirt	GC	11/16
DRAGON BALL Z: BUDOKAI 3 Trading cards, including exclusive Hi-Tech card	PS2	11/17
METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SNAKE EATER Demo disc	PS2	11/18
GOLDENEYE: ROGUE AGENT Free 30-day Rhapsody music service trial	GC/PS2/XB	11/18

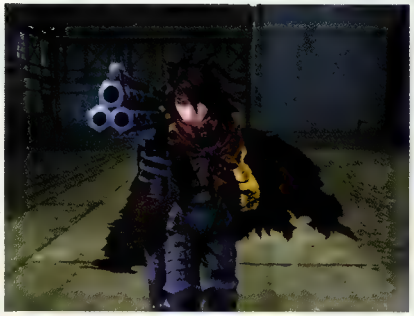
Get cool stuff with your games, while supplies last.

THE BIG DOG

FFVII GETS SOME ACTION

JAPAN

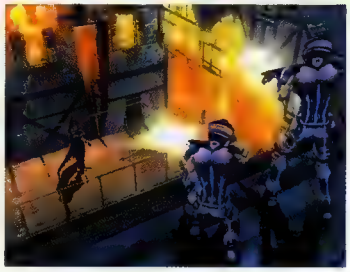


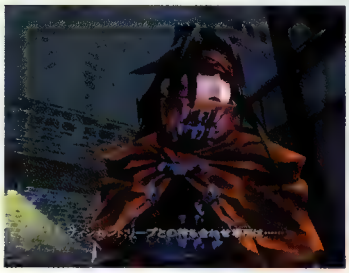


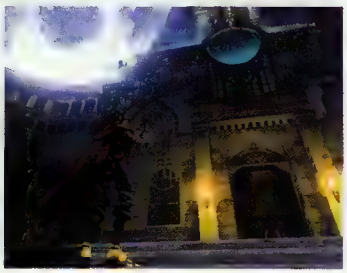
Set three years after *Final Fantasy VII, Dirge of Cerberus* stars the mysterious Vincent Valentine, the ex-Turk turned invaluable ally. It's also part of the "Compilation of *Final Fantasy VII*," which contains the movie *Advent Children* (see our last issue) and cell-phone game *Before Crisis* (check out page 40).

Driven underground by the devastation of the meteor—remember *FFVII*'s ending?—a band of warriors known as the Deep Ground Soldiers starts terrorizing local towns. Vincent must step up, along with as-yet-unrevealed characters from *FFVII*.

Unfortunately, the game wasn't playable at TGS. Rumors point toward shoot-em-up action using Vincent's gun. However the game turns out, our interest is piqued by these first images.







ANDRE 3000 DAVID LACHAPELLE

INTERNATIONAL REPORT

PHONE HOME

REVISIT THE WORLD OF FINAL FANTASY VII

JAPAN

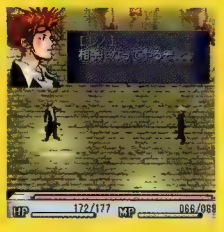
→ *Final Fantasy VII* fans may incessantly argue about their favorite characters, but there's one point on which they all agree: The Turks kick ass. These badasses are the Shinra Corporation's elite bodyguards—and its undercover espionage and dirty tricks team. Snappy dressers, too. The Turks are an obvious choice to star in the first *Final Fantasy VII* spin-off. But *Before Crisis*' platform—mobile phones?!?—is a bit of a curveball.

As a new recruit to the Turks, you'll take on tasks given by your superiors. These missions take place on the dirty, mazelike streets of Midgar, *FFVII*'s memorable metropolis. While the game has action-based battles, it features encounters on a separate screen. Given the limited range of motion available from even a top-class cell phone's directional inputs, playing is as simple (and as dull) as holding down the central button.

To make up for this, *Before Crisis* lets players craft magic-imbued materia through a clever mechanism: your phone's camera. Materia is generated according to the dominant color in the gamer's photos: A mostly red picture makes red fire materia, for example.

Network play promises to be a big part of the *Before Crisis* experience. Players in a tight spot—captured by rebels, say, or overwhelmed by superior forces—can message other players for help. Friends can spring you from jail or join your fight, even in midbattle. Though Square has yet to release details, new missions, characters, and environments are due to be gradually introduced, keeping players hooked and subscribed.

Unfortunately, at a pre-Tokyo Game Show event, Square Enix representatives flatly denied the possibility of releasing the game in the United States—phones here aren't compatible with the top-of-the-line NTT DoCoMo FOMA 900i series handsets that *Before Crisis* requires. Given that the company has also stated there are no plans to port it to another platform, you'd better hop on a plane if you want to check it out. ←



→ This image of Cloud isn't from *Before Crisis*. It's taken from *FFVII* movie *Advent Children* (see our last issue for the scoop) and features Panasonic's P900iV phone— the model that plays *Before Crisis*, available now in Japan.

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Violence


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GAMEPLANNER | NOVEMBER 2004

ALL RELEASE DATES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE. SO IT'S NOT OUR FAULT!

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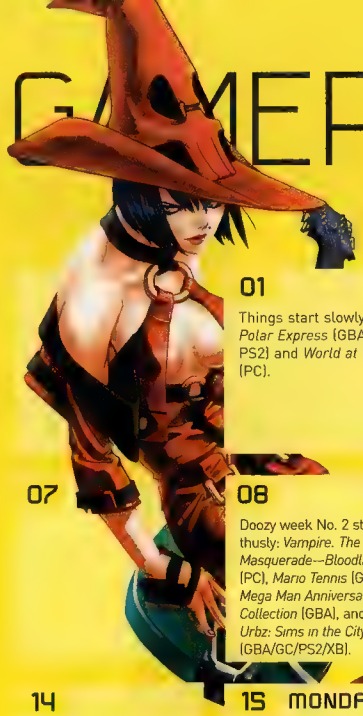

01

Things start slowly with *Polar Express* (GBA/GC/PS2) and *World at War* (PC).

02 TUESDAY

It begins. *Half-Life 2* (PC), *Sonic Mega Collection Plus* (PS2/XB), *Sega Superstars* (PS2), *Lord of the Rings: The Third Age* (GBA/GC/PS2/XB), *King of Fighters '02/'03* (PS2), *Godzilla: Save the Earth* (PS2/XB), *Armies of Exigo* (PC), *ATV Off Road Fury 3* (PS2), *The Bard's Tale* (PS2/XB), *Spyro: A Hero's Tail* (GC/PS2/XB), *Playboy: The Mansion* (PC/PS2/XB), *WWE Smackdown vs. Raw* (PS2), *Need for Speed Underground 2* (GC/PC/PS2/XB), and *GMR* favorite *Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal* (PS2) all hit, signifying the software-pocalypse that is November 2004.

05

Disney/Pixar's newest feature, the superhero-tinged *The Incredibles*, flies in to save us all. In Japan, it's called *Mr. Incredible*. Isn't that crazy? OK, not really.

06

07

08

Doozy week No. 2 starts thusly: *Vampire: The Masquerade—Bloodlines* (PC), *Mario Tennis* (GC), *Mega Man Anniversary Collection* (GBA), and *The Urbz: Sims in the City* (GBA/GC/PS2/XB).

09 TUESDAY

Finally, *Halo 2* (XB) arrives. Oh, yeah, there are some other games, too: *Jak 3* (PS2), *Rumble Roses* (PS2), *Karaoke Revolution* (XB), *Gretzky NHL 2005* (PS2), *Karaoke Revolution Vol. 3* (PS2), *Pacific Fighters* (PC), *Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault* (PC), *Backyard Wrestling 2: There Goes the Neighborhood* (PS2/XB), *Guilty Gear Isuka* (PS2), and *EyeToy Anti-Grav* (PS2) all put up a good fight.

11

Dungeon Lords (PC) is looking pretty lonely over here on the 11th. Don't you wish you were on the ninth with all the other cool games, huh, *Dungeon Lords*? Oh, look, *Dungeon Lords* is gonna cry.

12

The profoundly tasteless people behind *Child's Play 5: Seed of Chucky* sic their killer dolls on the world. Don't go to the official fansite while eating, as Christian did. Guacamole will never taste the same.

13

14

15 MONDAY

Painkiller: Battle Out of Hell (PC), *Crash 'N' Burn* (PS2/XB), *Metal Slug Advance* (GBA), *Spy vs. Spy* (PS2), *Donkey Kong Country 2* (GBA), *King of Fighters '02/'03* (XB), *World of WarCraft* (PC), *Lord of the Rings: The Battle For Middle-earth* (PC), *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater* (PS2), *Metroid Prime 2: Echoes* (GC), *EverQuest II* (PC), and *NCAA March Madness 2005* (XB) start the week. You know, just a few games.

16 TUESDAY

The choices today are *ESPN College Hoops 2005* (PS2/XB), *Atari Anthology* (PS2/XB), *Sega Classics Collection* (PS2), *Samurai Warriors XL* (PS2), *Fear Factor: Unleashed* (GBA), *Prince of Persia: Warrior Within* (GC/PC/PS2/XB), *King Arthur* (GC/PS2/XB), *Blinx 2* (XB), *Sid Meier's Pirates* (PC), *Call of Duty: Finest Hour* (GC/PS2/XB), *Fight Club* (PS2/XB), *Demon Stone* (XB), *Dragon Ball Z: Budokai 3* (PS2), *Baten Kaitos* (GC), and *Dance Dance Revolution Ultramix 2* (XB).

17

GoldenEye: Rogue Agent (GC/PS2/XB) and *Wild Arms: Alter Code F* (PS2) bring up the rear.

20

21

Nintendo launches its new dual-screen system, the Nintendo DS, today. As of press time, an unconfirmed lineup of games accompanies it. Get scribblin'!

22

23

It's easy to look super when you're all alone. *Viewtiful Joe 2* (GC/PS2) struts its stuff in solitude. Oh, Joe, you know we kid just because we love you.

24

25

28

30

Ghost Recon 2 (PS2/XB) commences operations on the final day of the month.

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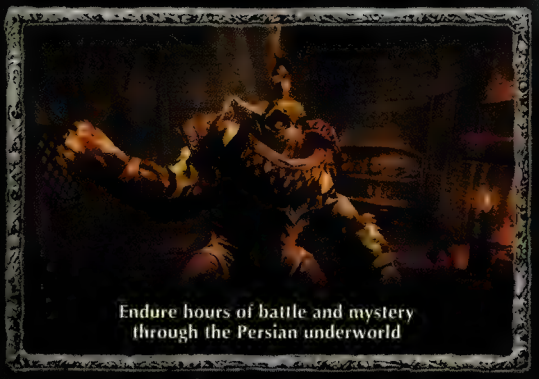

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*Game of the Year: Academy of Interactive Arts & Sciences, *U.S. Official PlayStation Magazine*, *Electronic Gaming Monthly*, *Official Xbox Magazine* (Staff Pick), *PSE2*

UBISOFT™

NEXT

WARNING! HAZARDOUS MATERIAL

Here at *GMR*, we preview games a little differently. To ensure that our previews are as relevant as possible, we feature only titles that will be released within si[illegible]. We also record our level of excitement about each game with cool little flames. Previews are not reviews—they're merely a guid[illegible] a game in progress is looking. They're snapshots. If we're not very excited about a game, it gets one or two flames. If [illegible]ide, expect to see three flames. Over and above that, you can bet we're pretty excited. It's our duty to tell you what [illegible]s development cycle—positive, negative, or somewhere in between.

INCOMING GAMES PREVIEWED

PREVIEWED THIS ISSUE:

RELEASE | NOVEMBER

METROID PRIME 2: ECHOES

AFRAID OF THE DARK?

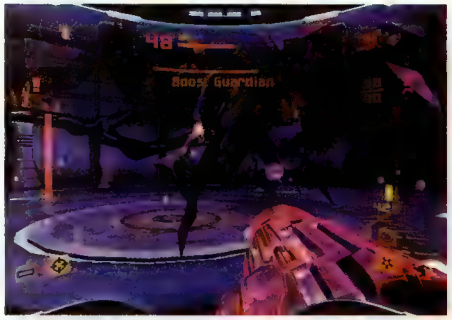
SYSTEM GC PUBLISHER NINTENDO DEVELOPER RETRO STUDIOS

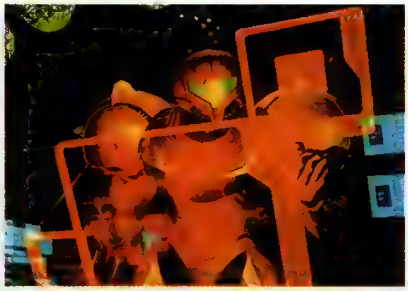
For the first time in the history of the franchise, a *Metroid* game is not about metroids. Or, at least, that's what we're being led to believe by the developers at Retro Studios. Whereas the battle between Samus and the space pirates served as the crux of *Metroid Prime*, that conflict takes a back seat to a new struggle in *Metroid Prime 2: Echoes*.

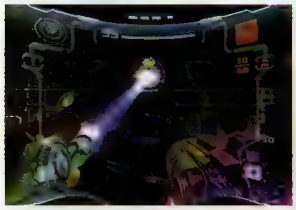
The pirates are indeed present: Their battle with troopers from the Galactic Federation on the planet Aether is what brings Samus back into the picture. They've been using the phazon generated by a recent meteor impact to mass-produce metroids, but we quickly learn that being hit by a phazon-infused meteor causes a nasty little side effect: It splits your world into two dimensions. The peaceful inhabitants of Light Aether (the Luminoth) must fend off the invading hordes of Dark Aether (the Ing); because there's not enough energy to sustain both sides, the only way for one group to survive is to eliminate the other. The need for the assistance of a powerful bounty hunter is now apparent.

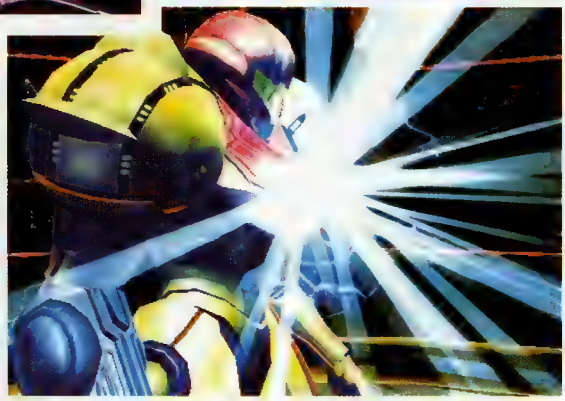
The presence of phazon appears to be the only discernable link between the two GameCube *Metroid* games, and Retro tells us that *Prime 2* isn't so much a continuation of the story as it is simply Samus' next adventure. Appropriately enough, much of *Echoes* is similar to the original *Prime*, but a few improvements have been made. Scanning the environment—vital to picking up clues and learning the game's backstory—has been streamlined with a color-coding system: Key items such as elevators and door switches remain red, everything you've scanned is green, and stuff you haven't scanned is blue. Samus' standard combat visor also now sports a directional damage indicator, making it easier to locate hostiles.

The biggest change is how Samus explores this new divided world. In past *Metroid* titles, the exploration and combat elements coexisted on the same plane. In *Echoes*, it seems that

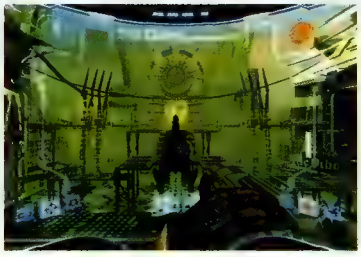






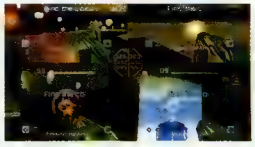


→ Samus' new Dark Suit reduces the amount of damage she takes while traveling through Dark Aether. Before she acquires the suit, she'll have to scamper between safe zones, generated by permanent and temporary points of light.



MULTIPLAYER METROID

We're at the point where online games such as *Unreal Tournament 2004* and *Joint Operations* offer huge maps and high player capacity, so why would anyone want to go back to four-player offline splitscreen? Maybe it's because the underlying principles between the two styles are different enough to avoid direct comparison. According to the *Echoes* team at Retro, playing alongside your friends in the same room is a much more social event than playing against anonymous names on the Internet. It's a good point, as a four-player session of *Echoes'* deathmatch mode quickly turned into a trash-talking, elbow-bumping affair that brought back fond memories of N64's *GoldenEye*. Because it's not really the focus of the game, multiplayer lacks a lot of the bells and whistles of other FPSes, but its smaller scale allows for a game that's uniquely *Metroid*: Missile and beam selection is important, as is escaping firefights via grappling hook and morphball. As long as the advantages and limitations of the design are recognized, a good game can be made from it. Hopefully, this will be the case with splitscreen *Metroid*.



the phazon meteor also unzipped the gameplay mechanics: The lush, organic environments of Light Aether focus on searching and puzzle solving, while the dead and dreary Dark Aether is where Samus will be fighting the majority of her battles. That's not to say that Light Aether won't have a boss fight or two or that Dark Aether will be without problem solving, but the separation between action and adventure will be more distinct this time around.

We've known about the dynamics of the light and dark beams, and now we know a little more about how the two worlds relate to each other, as well as how Samus can use some new tools to navigate them. There will be instances when an item or object will be visible in one world but exist in the other (tearing the very fabric of time and space is a tricky thing, you know). One example we saw was a simple bridge switch that could be seen in the light world but had to be activated in the dark one. We expect this dimension hopping to play a prominent part in the game, as will Samus' two new visors: the dark visor and the echo visor. The former allows you to target multiple objects, including the amorphous black goo that the Ing creatures turn into to evade your fire, while the latter allows you to actually see sound waves emitted as enemy attacks or environmental clues. Samus also eventually earns the dark suit, which reduces (but not completely eliminates) the amount of damage inflicted by Dark Aether's atmosphere.

At this point, we can sense that some purists are getting worried. Don't panic: It appears that Retro has made every new element introduced in *Echoes* relevant to the *Metroid* universe. And with all the first-person competition this autumn, maybe being a little different isn't such a bad thing.

GMR SAYS → Hard to believe, but *Echoes* looks even better than the first *Metroid Prime*, and the light/dark mechanic is a nice change of pace for the series.

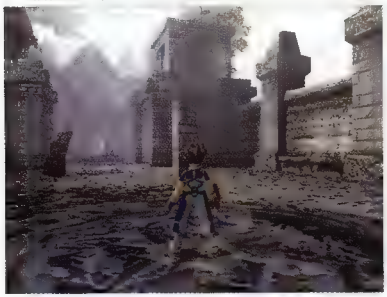
→ HOW HOT...

RELEASE | NOVEMBER

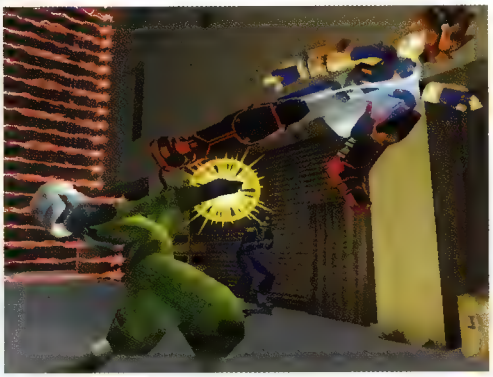
VIRTUA QUEST

VIRTUA IS ITS OWN REWARD

SYSTEM GC/PS2 PUBLISHER SEGA DEVELOPER SEGA AM2



→ Believe it or not, *Virtua Quest* is a spin-off of *Virtua Fighter*, in which you play Sei, an Internet hacker in search of lost data who must battle bits of code that carry the essence of the great martial artists of the world, known as the Virtua Souls. With *Virtua Quest*, Sega may be shooting for an audience more casual than the hardcore *VF* fan, as the premise and screenshots suggest, though the game does show an intriguing promise of depth.



Given that Sega AM2's first effort at creating a *Virtua Fighter* RPG resulted in the Dreamcast cult classic *Shenmue*, it should come as little surprise that its second attempt is shaping up to be similarly offbeat. A sort of brawling-intensive action-RPG, *Virtua Quest* seems to combine elements of quite a few games that have come before it, including *.hack*, *Phantasy Star Online*, and *Bionic Commando*. Oh, and *Virtua Fighter*, too, although the connection may not be obvious at first.

Virtua Quest is the story of Sei, a newcomer to the future's most popular pastime: hacking into the Internet in search of abandoned data (or, as his friend euphemistically calls it, "treasure hunting"). Soon after earning his Hunter's license, Sei and his Mag-like companion Bit find themselves trapped in virtual space—and on the wrong end of an online manhunt initiated by unknown enemies.

Enter the Virtua Souls. Trapped throughout cyberspace are special bits of data that contain the essences of the world's greatest martial artists—faces that longtime *VF* fans should recognize. By besting a Virtua Soul in combat, Sei earns new martial arts techniques to program into his versatile power glove...effectively granting him a repertoire of *VF*'s greatest hits.

Combat starts out simple, with Sei making short work of brain-dead foes. By the time he earns his first Virtua Soul, though, the game hints at deeper, more challenging battles ahead, suggesting those special techniques will be seeing plenty of action.

Virtua Quest seems to be geared toward an audience more casual than hardcore *VF* experts. But with familiar faces like Akira and ominous hints of an army of Durals, the plot promises to offer at least a few nods to its parent series. If nothing else, it should make for an effective gateway drug to the more addictive pleasures of true virtua fighting.

GMR SAYS → Hardcore *Virtua Fighter* fans may turn up their noses, but this *VF* spin-off is worth a hearty sniff or two.

→ HOW HOT...

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— XBN MAGAZINE

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— TEAMXBOX.COM

"THIS FALL, THE XBOX GETS ITS NEXT KILLER APP."

– OFFICIAL XBOX MAGAZINE

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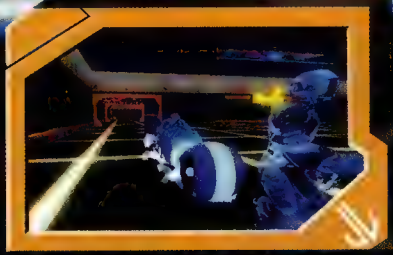
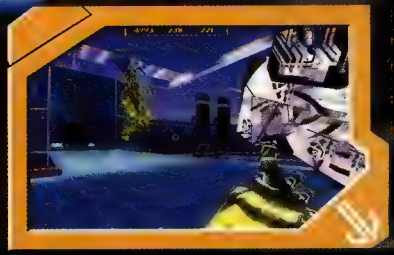


Ride into multiplayer battle with guns blazing as you switch from foot to cycle anywhere, anytime.



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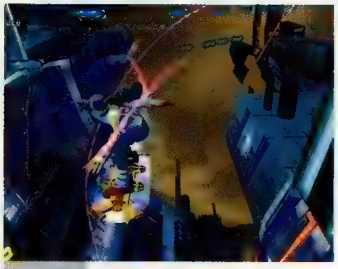
RELEASE | NOVEMBER

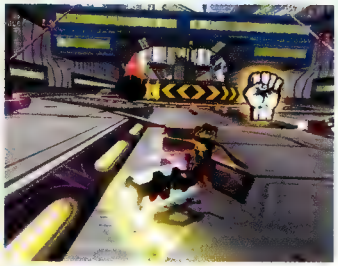
EYETOY: ANTI-GRAV

BELIEVE IT OR NOT, I'M FLOATING ON AIR

SYSTEM PS2 PUBLISHER SCEA DEVELOPER HARMONIX

→ *Anti-Grav* represents the next generation in EyeToy gaming. After you calibrate movement with your head, you are sent into a sort of virtual hoverboard park—and away you go. From the maker of *Karaoke Revolution* and *Amplitude*, this is one EyeToy game we're keeping our—ahem—eye on.





The novelty of seeing yourself on television with the EyeToy minigames was starting to wear thin. Thankfully, Harmonix, the evil geniuses behind *Karaoke Revolution*, *Amplitude*, and *Frequency*, are working on a conventional game that will take advantage of the funky little PS2 webcam that's now sitting atop your television.

So, here's the deal: It's a hoverboard racing game that plays out like a hybrid of the *SSX* series and the classic *WipeOut* games. Pick from eight unique racers—each with its own unique stunt moves—and then proceed to grind and glide through a bunch of futuristic cityscapes.

How the hell are you supposed to control the action with the EyeToy? Good question. When shown at this year's E3, it looked a little dicey. The technology first relied upon you wearing hot-pink gloves straight off Wham's greatest video hits for the camera to spot movement. Problem No. 1: hot pink. Problem No. 2: glove funk. Enough said. The way *Anti-Grav* works now actually makes sense and, once you get used to it, works really well. You calibrate the screen by having it track your head. From there, it can figure out where your hands are (unless you're some kind of multihanded freak).

Basically, you duck low to gain speed, quickly bob your head up to jump, and use your arms to lean or, in freestyle areas (and when jumping), to pull off some fairly sick stuntwork. The only thing lacking: a way to properly knock the competition off their boards. *Anti-Grav* supports up to four players.

Anti-Grav looks like a solid step in the right direction for EyeToy games. Heck, anything other than having to touch bubbles on a screen sounds good to us.

GMR SAYS → It's high time we started getting real games that take advantage of the EyeToy's capabilities. Developer Harmonix doesn't suck, and something tells us, neither will this game.

→ HOW HOT...

RELEASE | NOVEMBER

SPLINTER CELL CHAOS THEORY

SAM FISHER, SKULL CRUSHER

SYSTEM GC/PC/PS2/XB PUBLISHER UBISOFT DEVELOPER UBISOFT MONTREAL

Lesser men get paid to crunch numbers and write visibility reports charting the market. Superspy Sam Fisher gets paid to be invisible and crunch skulls with the butt of a rifle. Granted, his job is rough on the old social calendar, but the sense of a job well done—especially when the job well done saves the world—is unparalleled. And you can't beat the travel benefits, even with some sort of sticklike device.

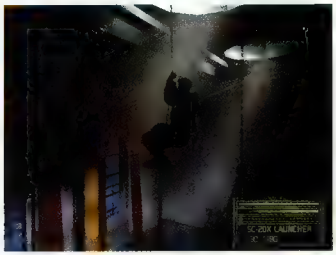
With southern Asia destabilizing, Fisher, protagonist for both *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell* games, again leaps into action. For this installment of the series, developer Ubisoft Montreal has concentrated its efforts on making Fisher's interpersonal relationships even more cozy; now, the man can hang from rafters and pull nearby enemies upward by the head to snap their necks or grab them and toss them over ledges. A new knife allows Fisher greater flexibility in melee combat, and, depending on the situation, players can jam it into an enemy or use it to knock him insensate.

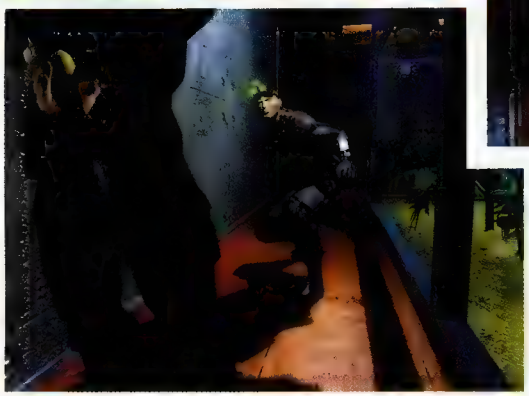
Theory will be more forgiving than its predecessor *Pandora Tomorrow*, which will be welcome news for anyone who's had to play the same sequence 10 times over in an attempt at meeting the game's sometimes overstringent requirements. Whereas *Tomorrow* took trial-and-error gameplay to new heights, this new adventure will allow Fisher the occasional screw-up and rewards successfully completed goals by opening up new avenues for exploration as well as extra tasks to complete.

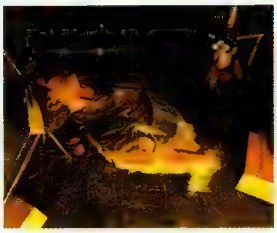
Multiplayer modes enable two players to cooperatively attack missions both online and off, and Ubisoft will also include an as-yet-unidentified series of competitive multiplayer challenges, ensuring this theory will be exceedingly hard to discount come holiday $$$eason.

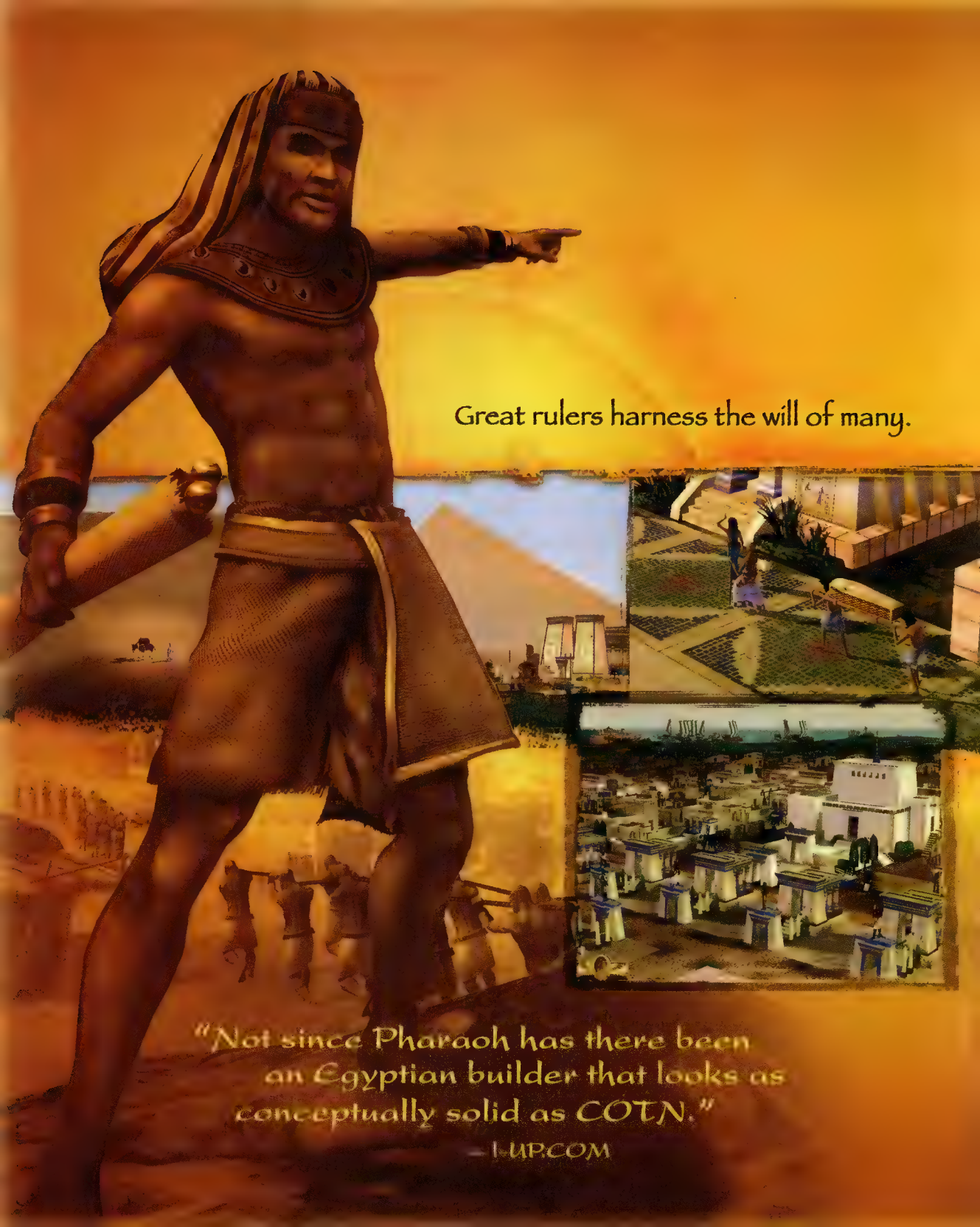
GMR SAYS → Chaotically good.

→ HOW HOT...








Great rulers harness the will of many.
"Not since Pharaoh has there been an Egyptian builder that looks as conceptually solid as COTN."
– 1UP.COM

RELEASE | WINTER

PROJECT: SNOWBLIND

EX-DEUS EX

SYSTEM PC/PS2/XB PUBLISHER EIDOS DEVELOPER CRYSTAL DYNAMICS

→ Eidos' latest release underwent a name change from *Deus Ex* to the (apparently) more consumer-friendly *Project: Snowblind*, but the publisher vows to maintain the depth that made this an award-winning FPS in the first place.

Eidos sure has a thing for six-million-dollar men. First, it puts out the *Deus Ex* series, and now this. You see, no matter how much Eidos denies it, *Project: Snowblind* was originally a multiplayer-slanted spin-off of the *Deus Ex* series. It can shed the name, but the game still looks promising—it has a deep 11-mission campaign, 16-player deathmatches, smart A.I., and, of course, lots of crazy gadgets and cybernetic implants.

What's a sci-fi game without a dystopian near future? In 2065, soldiers wounded in battle can volunteer to get bioenhancements. That's you, in store for what Eidos hypes as a "nonstop, action-packed ride." The jury's still out there, but we do know of shootouts in ancient temples, war-torn streets, and burned-out cityscapes (across 16 slick-looking maps in single-player mode).

Beyond the sharp visuals, there is also a ridiculous number of unique weapons, gadgets, and abilities you can acquire. The rail gun, for example, can shoot through walls. If you opt for a cybernetic vision enhancement, you can also see through walls. Get the picture? Then there's the fléchette gun. Its alternate fire mode sends out small nanobots that'll seek, circle, and kill your targets. Lob the spiderbot grenade and, upon landing, it will activate and intelligently attack your enemies.

Get this: The A.I. has also been seriously amped up. Enemies react to how the fight goes. If said spiderbots attack, enemies will try to fight back or flee. Ditto for the guys on your side. The massive assaults go on all around you, and these guys are more than just props that get in your way.

Then there is the 16-person multiplayer mode. In recent tests in urban and temple battles, the game has run smoothly over both Xbox and PS2. And with the inclusion of vehicles (cars, assault buggies, and even small mechs), it looks like something even PC gamers could get into.

GMR SAYS → If Eidos can deliver all the action of *Deus Ex* without all the role-playing BS that comes with it, we are most definitely down.

→ HOW HOT...

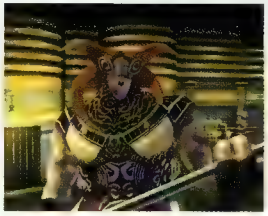
RELEASE | NOVEMBER

BATEN KAITOS

COUNTING CARDS AND KILLING CREATURES

SYSTEM GC PUBLISHER NAMCO DEVELOPER MONOLITH SOFT

→ It's all in the cards: Despite what you might think, *Baten Kaitos'* card system actually makes the game more exciting rather than slower.



Just as the people behind *Xenogears* left Square and created the PS2 hit *Xenosaga*, many of the minds behind *Chrono Cross* followed them to make *Baten Kaitos*, and their fingerprints are all over the game. If this means nothing to you, just know that *Baten Kaitos* is a traditional Square-style RPG with a more rustic, organic style than *Final Fantasy* has.

The story could not start more typically. The lead character, Kalas, is seeking his fortune. Within an hour, he stumbles upon a naive princess, resurrects a dark god, and runs afoul of an airship-loving evil empire—in essence, he encounters all of the tepid but comfortable RPG fluff we've been fed for years now.

What's interesting is that instead of playing as Kalas, you play as...yourself. You see, in the world of *Baten Kaitos*, adventurers join with guardian spirits from another realm. Kalas will often ask for your opinion or introduce you to people. It adds texture to what otherwise appears to be a rather rote story.

Most people react to news of *Baten Kaitos'* card-based battle system with trepidation, but it's nothing dull or confusing in practice. In *Baten Kaitos*, magical cards can capture the essence of anything and unleash it at any time. You use stored weapons, armor, and spells in battle—but really, these are pretty traditional turn-based conflicts.

Each card has a digit on it, and getting straights or pairs—an element cribbed from poker—nets you damage bonuses. This should prove addictive, provided the developers can add enough variety to the cards to keep the battles fresh.

Baten Kaitos is obviously not an evolutionary leap forward for RPGs, but rather a competent synthesis of old and new ideas. For the RPG-starved GameCube audience, it's an unexpectedly traditional pleasure, and at least that's novel 'round these parts.

GMR SAYS → In many ways, the game seems too common, but the card aspects and great atmosphere push it back toward relevance.

→ HOW HOT...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RELEASE | NOVEMBER

GOLDENEYE: ROGUE AGENT

NO BONDING

SYSTEM GC/PS2/XB PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS DEVELOPER EALA

Were there a sign welcoming you to EA's new Bondian first-person shooter, *GoldenEye: Rogue Agent*, it would read, "You must be this evil to be allowed on this ride" and have beside it an arrow pointing to a picture of a man kicking a kitten.

Stuff James Bond, Agent 007. You're GoldenEye, an MI6 agent gone bad, a killing machine more efficient than sarin gas, and a man out for revenge. Dr. No took your eye, so you're going to take his life or die trying. Lucky for you, you have powerful allies in the would-be world-beater Goldfinger and his hat-tossing lickspittle Oddjob, as well as a brand-new golden eye allowing you to, among other things, see through walls, hack electronics, and throw up a bullet-repelling shield. You also have two hands, which can hold and shoot guns.

So go ahead and take hostages. They stop bullets real good. And it's not as if you'll be drummed out of the bad guys' union for throwing saps off of ledges, freezing them in pits, or charbroiling their proverbial Double Whoppers with rocket flames.

Steeped in *Bond* lore, *Rogue Agent* includes locales and characters from *007* films. It's familiar and firmly rooted in the *Bond* tradition, yet it still presents a side of the *Bond* universe not normally focused on—its villains. The game immerses you in a war between Goldfinger and Dr. No, with each side rushing to acquire powerful OMEN technology.

GoldenEye's twisted heart seems in the right place—the ability to take hostages and utilize specific deathtraps instead of just destructive elements in the environment sets the protagonist apart from Agent 007. In addition, Electronic Arts' "E.V.I.L." A.I. promises to fuel enemy behaviors in all sorts of novel ways. Foes under E.V.I.L.'s direction react differently to players' actions, perhaps folding under extreme aggression or becoming emboldened by timid play. Enemy minibosses, under the proper pressure, will even take their own as hostages, using their comrades as shields against a withering fire.

→ That's Bond, no Bond: When we first heard about the new *GoldenEye* earlier this year, we thought it was an April Fool's joke. A *Bond* game without Bond? And the villains are the heroes? Jeez, what next, a Darth Vader game?

SCUM AND VILLAINY

Aside from the game's warring chieftains, Goldfinger and Dr. No, *Rogue Agent* also features such *Bond* bit players as the razor-tipped-hat-throwing bodyguard Oddjob from *Goldfinger*; *GoldenEye*'s lethal-legged Russian assassin and femme fatale Xenia Onatop; Francisco Scaramanga, he of the golden gun from *The Man With the Golden Gun*; and *Goldfinger*'s temptress, Pussy Galore. Although most of the game's characters will be voiced by soundalikes, Electronic Arts has enlisted Christopher Lee to reprise his role as Scaramanga and British actress Judi Dench will play MI6's director, M.

No collection of would-be world conquerors would be complete without villainous pits of despair, and *Rogue Agent* doesn't disappoint here, either. Sharp-eyed *Bond* fans will recognize Ernst Stavro Blofeld's volcano lair from *You Only Live Twice*; Egyptian pyramids that played host to pivotal scenes in *The Spy Who Loved Me*; San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge, showcased in *A View to a Kill*; and *Moonraker*'s equatorial base. Further, famed *James Bond* set designer Ken Adam has also been tapped by Electronic Arts to ensure that the game's locales—including its never-before-seen ones—reek of the *007* style.

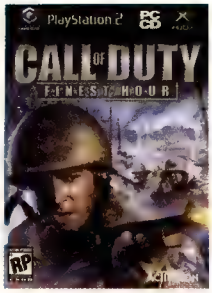
Central to the heart of *Rogue Agent*'s play, and adding to its intrigue, is its weapon acquisition system. There are more than 50 different pistols, rifles, and rockets—meaning more than 100 different combinations—but GoldenEye has to pick each new weapon up off the bodies of dead enemies. This lends an extreme sense of urgency, as there's no stockpiling guns, and ammunition can be picked up only for the weapons GoldenEye holds. Run out of ammo, and it's a bad time for the bad guy.

A brief playtest showed off *Rogue Agent*'s great sense of style, as well the dogged determination of its E.V.I.L. A.I.-fueled foes. In Hong Kong, huge dragon statues spurt flames and can be used to toast hostile aircraft, but you'll have to crawl for cover as the ships' bullets, combined with determined enemy attacks, start you off in a most precarious position. A quick tap of the Xbox or PS2 D-pad activates GoldenEye's special powers and, using the MRI ability, enemies can be seen hiding behind obstacles. In the face of gunfire, a tap up on the D-pad hacks an enemy's guns, making them less accurate. Using these two powers, you can easily frustrate and flush out the ground-based opposition, which provides a perfect opportunity to run to the switch to activate the dragon statues' fiery breath.

But it's in multiplayer that *Rogue Agent* shows its heritage as the true heir to the *GoldenEye* throne. EA has done its best to incorporate *Bond* themes and environments into the package; one mode allows teams to fight over moving objects such as trains, trying to push and pull a vehicle to some predetermined location. Online or off, the game provides much in the way of explosions, frenetic use of superpowers, and cool team- or competitive-based killing, like some deadly delicious martini that, by law, must be described as "shaken, not stirred."

GMR SAYS → All in favor of great multiplayer action, say "Eye." But where's online play for GameCube?

→ HOW HOT...



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RELEASE | NOVEMBER

GODZILLA: SAVE THE EARTH

IT'S HIS BIRTHDAY, YOU KNOW

SYSTEM PS2/XB PUBLISHER ATARI DEVELOPER PIPEWORKS SOFTWARE

→ C'mon Godzy, we just want to give you a birthday spanking! Godzilla's (possibly) best game ever comes on the King's 50th anniversary.

Godzilla's had a great ride these past 50 years. Yep, the King of Monsters is 50. As he wraps up his cinematic career with *Godzilla: Final Wars* (due in theaters in Japan this December), he smashes his way into what could possibly be his best videogame yet.

2002's *Godzilla: Destroy All Monsters Melee* was something of a surprise. After years of mediocre games, Atari's monstrous battle royale wasn't half-bad. *Save the Earth* follows squarely in the crashing footsteps of its predecessor, but with plenty of refinements and additions.

The roster of monsters has been expanded to include more beasts from the *Godzilla* franchise. The locations have been beefed up—they're better looking with more variety. More exciting is the game's online play. Sure, you can duke it out on the couch as usual, but network support gives you other options.

The gameplay treads a fine line between wrestling and fighting, with controls that are responsive—but you don't have to have split-second timing to mash things up. Each monster, of course, matches its appearance and abilities from the films, and strengths and weaknesses of each character have been balanced to ensure the fights remain fair.

The single-player mode isn't pure brawling, either—there are challenges available: destroying battleships, for example. The story mode (which isn't that deep, but this is *Godzilla* we're talking about) also throws you some curveballs, such as protecting a building from alien forces, in between the vanilla fights.

Obsessive fans of the big black beastie will also be pleased to know that there is plenty of unlockable concept art, including a gallery of rough work for the upcoming *Godzilla: Final Wars*. In short, Pipeworks is again working to create a *Godzilla* title with broad appeal.

GMR SAYS → This game won't turn your head if you're not a fan of wrasslin' or the big G, but it's shaping up to be solid.

→ HOW HOT...

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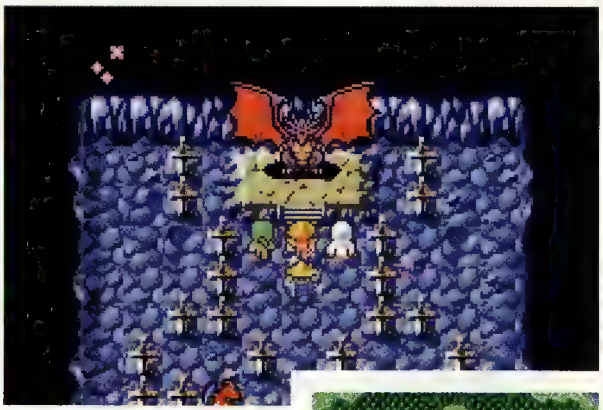
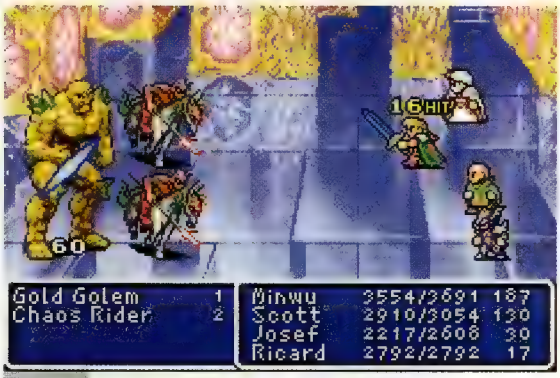
RELEASE | NOVEMBER

FINAL FANTASY I & II: DAWN OF SOULS

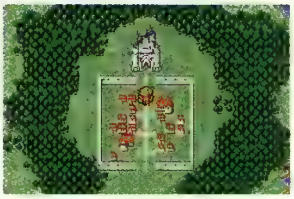
LITTLE PEOPLE TAKE TO THE FIELD ONCE AGAIN

SYSTEM GBA PUBLISHER NINTENDO DEVELOPER SQUARE ENIX





→ A final fantasy come true: Square Enix has added about 20 hours of new content to its RPG classic *Final Fantasy I & II: Dawn of Souls*, not to mention the fact that it managed to get TWO games, great graphics, music, and sound on one little GBA cart. *Dawn of Souls* offers ample proof that Square Enix isn't taking the *FF* series for granted.



Two games for the price of one is a good deal. But two classic *Final Fantasy* games, each packed full of new music, graphics, gameplay, story, and secrets? That's an *absurdly* good deal. *Final Fantasy I & II: Dawn of Souls* crams a ridiculous amount into a Game Boy Advance cartridge.

Dawn of Souls is no shovelware port; this new portable version stands toe-to-toe with the recent PlayStation rerelease, with enhanced, colorful graphics, an orchestrated soundtrack, and story-advancing cut-scenes.

More subtle changes have been made under the hood. *Final Fantasy I* has been tweaked with a genre-standard MP system, making magic users much more useful. *Final Fantasy II*, though, has been rebuilt from scratch—and the results are fantastic. The second *Final Fantasy* uses a "no experience" system in which party members improve through in-battle actions: Attacking with heavy weapons builds strength, casting spells improves magic power, and so on. Unfortunately, every previous version has been insanely unbalanced against the player, requiring hundreds of extra random battles just to survive. Though the "no experience" system is intact, the nuts-and-bolts implementation is completely different. This version of *Final Fantasy II* is the first one to be actually *playable*, and that's reason enough to celebrate.

About 20 hours of new content round out the package. *Final Fantasy I* has four new dungeons unlocked by defeating each elemental fiend. These randomly generated mazes have a combined 75 floors and are packed with puzzles, rare loot, and extremely difficult bosses from past *Final Fantasy* games. *Final Fantasy II* has a new eight- to 10-hour story sequence starring new heroes and set directly after the end of the main game. With best-ever versions of two old-school RPGs, this tricked-out compilation has plenty for everyone.

GMR SAYS → We're seeing double: two revised classics on one cart. That's like getting hold on two revised classics on one cart. Awesome.

→ HOW HOT...

WELCOME TO AN ENDLESS NIGHTMARE OF PAIN AND SUFFERING

WELCOME HOME

Home is definitely where the heart is.

Along with some spleen. And a little chunk of liver in the hall.

"Best Adventure Game of E3" - IGN.com

"Forget about pushing the envelope. Silent Hill 4 tears it to pieces." - ARN Magazine

"In the end, Konami's game will, without a doubt, be the government scare fest of 2004." - IGN.com

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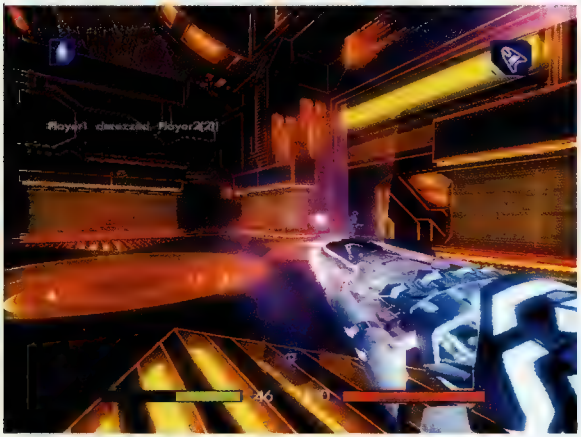
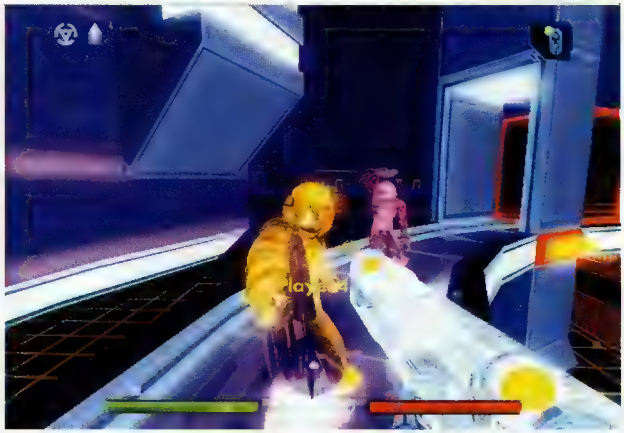
RELEASE | OCTOBER

TRON 2.0: KILLER APP

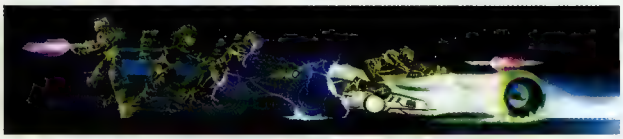
MMMM, COBALT BLUE

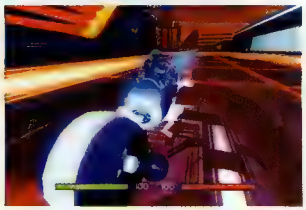
SYSTEM XB PUBLISHER BUENA VISTA DEVELOPER CLIMAX





→ *Tron 2.0: Killer App* takes the game back to its 1982 film roots with derezzing discs, lightcyles, and a story revolving around Jet Bradley, the son of the original *Tron*'s Alan Bradley.





Before anyone ever thought to jack in to the *Matrix*, there was *Tron*. Although the 1982 Disney film bombed, its premise was excellent and its technology state of the art. *Tron* was groundbreaking, in fact, being the first motion picture to feature computerized artwork.

Now, 22 years later, the story continues with *Tron 2.0: Killer App* for Xbox. An updated port of *Tron 2.0* for PC, *App* tells the story of Jet Bradley, son of the original *Tron*'s Alan Bradley. Like his old man, Jet gets pulled into an electric blue-gray computerized world fraught with peril and many a computer program gone awry.

Told in the first-person perspective, the adventure hearkens back to the game's film roots. The first weapon Jet acquires will be familiar to all who managed to stay awake through the movie: a powerful disc that, when hurled, can "derezz" (meaning waste) an enemy. Later, Jet can pilot a deadly contrail-producing lightcycle in a series of kill-or-die-trying duels against other racers.

An early preview build proved heavy on the techno jargon, choking the player with notions of patch routines, I/O nodes, archive bins, permissions, and binary bits. But its charm and sense of nostalgia are undeniable; the game features the same severe art direction and computer-masked voice work as the film that inspired it. As with *Tron 2.0*, *App* features such niceties as upgradeable abilities for its two protagonists and 16 different projectile and melee weapons.

The game has been slightly retuned for Xbox, with its online component augmented to take advantage of Microsoft's Live service. Ten new multiplayer maps have been added, as has a brand-new mode called override, wherein players can opt to fight in the first-person perspective and then quickly switch to lightcycle mode to run down the competition.

GMA SAYS → We're wondering what *Killer App*'s killer app is.

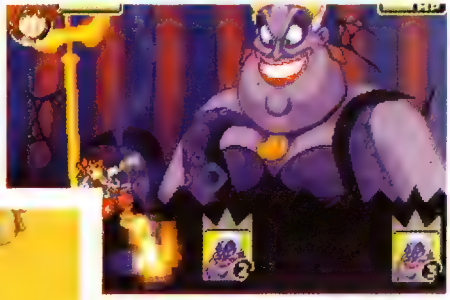
→ HOW HOT...

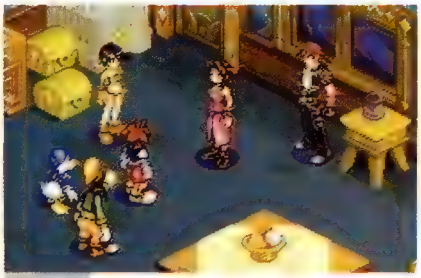
RELEASE | DECEMBER

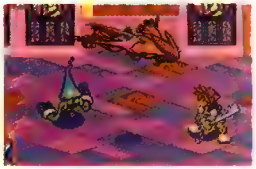
KINGDOM HEARTS: CHAIN OF MEMORIES

MEMORIES CAN WAIT

SYSTEM GBA PUBLISHER SQUARE ENIX DEVELOPER SQUARE ENIX







→ Disney and *Final Fantasy* meet again in Square Enix's *Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories*.

Next to power-hungry empires and evil white-haired girly men, amnesia is one of the most popular ways to add drama to an RPG. It keeps heroes on their toes and allows villains to surprise the heroine by mentioning how they used to date back in high school.

These days, it's hard to think of an RPG that doesn't feature a suppressed-memory subplot. With *Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories*, Square Enix is trying to make this tired cliché interesting again.

As the title hints, forgetfulness is the driving force for both story and gameplay. Sora and his friends begin their new quest by wandering into the Castle Oblivion, which robs them of their memories. Pummeling Heartless lets them collect cards that can unlock those stolen experiences.

Cards provide both combat skills and keys to missing areas in worlds that will be familiar to *KH* fans. Sora meets many familiar faces as well, but in this game he fights alone; allies can only pitch in as summons.

Combat feels remarkably similar to the PS2 game. The biggest difference, besides the 2D visuals, is that every action Sora takes is enabled by cards. Each card has a numeric value that determines its priority against enemy attacks, and when the deck is empty, Sora is forced to reshuffle before he can fight on. It's no big deal in standard battles, but boss encounters require careful resource management. Sora can tilt the odds in his favor a bit by combining several cards to unleash a superattack. Altogether, the system gives *COM* a more strategic feel than its console sibling.

KH fans have a while to wait yet for the true sequel, but *COM* promises to be a worthy diversion. And fittingly enough, it could be just the thing to freshen up those dusty memories of the original.

GMR SAYS → Hard to forget: *Chain of Memories* proves Square Enix is the reigning king of GBA RPGs.

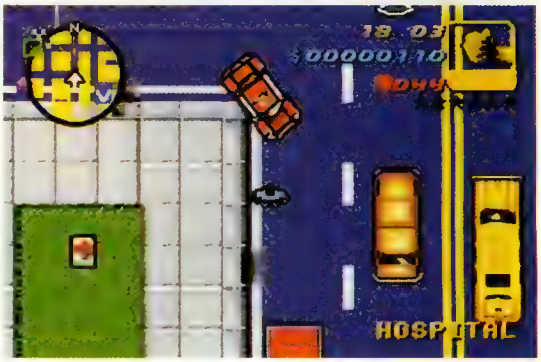
→ HOW HOT...

RELEASE | OCTOBER

GRAND THEFT AUTO ADVANCE

THE SAFE WAY TO STEAL CARS ON A ROAD TRIP

SYSTEM GBA PUBLISHER ROCKSTAR DEVELOPER DIGITAL ECLIPSE



→ *GTA*'s open-ended gameplay translates nicely to the GBA version. Visually more like the first two *GTA*'s top-down 2D look, *GTA Advance* brings Liberty City to handheld life.

Grand Theft Auto. Sony has it. Microsoft has it. And now Nintendo has it, too—on Game Boy Advance, granted, but that's definitely *Grand Theft Auto* on its hardware. Rockstar, along with developer Digital Eclipse, is taking the best-selling series in all of gamedom back to its roots and on to a handheld in the simply named *Grand Theft Auto Advance* for GBA.

Taking place in Liberty City one year before the events in *Grand Theft Auto 3*, the new game puts you in the shoes of petty hoodlum Mike, who's desperately grabbing all the cash he can in a bid to get out of Liberty City before it's too late. Just before he puts the last piece of the puzzle together, his partner Vinnie goes up in flames—and to make matters worse, the car bomb took all their money with him. Now you have to raise all the money again, figure out who killed Vinnie, and get revenge before the cops catch on.

All of the free-roaming gameplay that made the series great is in *GTAA*, but the view has returned to the top-down 2D style of the first two PlayStation installments. Despite the simplified graphics, you still have packages to find, side missions and odd jobs to take on, and lots of vehicles to commandeer: All the tanks, vans, buses, fire engines, and taxis you know and love are in the GBA version. They're not the only things that return: Though the protagonist and story are new, familiar faces from *GTA3* will make appearances either as allies or enemies.

With an install base as mammoth and diverse as the Game Boy Advance's, the handheld *Grand Theft Auto Advance* could be very big indeed for Rockstar, not to mention a good way to take nonlinear mayhem with you wherever you go.

Look for the game to hit shelves October 9, around the time of its bigger cousin's PS2 launch.

GMA SAYS → *GTA Advance* kicks it old school on the GBA. Class in session!

→ HOW HOT...

RELEASE | **OCTOBER**

THE INCREDIBLES

YOU HAD US AT SAMUEL L. JACKSON

SYSTEM GC/MAC/PC/PS2/XB PUBLISHER THQ DEVELOPER HEAVY IRON

→ Did you ever know that you're my hero?: *The Incredibles* features an all-star cast in a game that plays differently depending on the character.

Samuel L. Jackson voices superhero Frozone in THQ's version of *The Incredibles*. This is a clue that this game may not be just another licensed hack job.

The Incredibles—based on the Pixar film—extends the film's plot, weaving in and out of it as necessary for the gameplay to make sense. Part platformer, part action, part adventure, the game offers different experiences based on the character you play as.

Mr. Incredible, the only character not to be voiced by its film counterpart (Craig T. Nelson, aka Coach, was the holdout. Go figure.), has superstrength and agility. He smashes his way through burning buildings and skyscrapers, taking on droves of evil minions. His game style is all thumb-mashing brawler action.

Mrs. Incredible, or Elastigirl (voiced by Oscar winner Holly Hunter), can stretch much like Reed Richards of the Fantastic Four. While she can fight her way through most situations, her stretching abilities come in handy to reach faraway enemy henchmen or to return grenade balls to their throwers. Strategic grabs of hanging lights, poles, and other appendages get her through levels in nimble Spider-Man-like fashion.

Dash is the Incredibles' adolescent son. He boasts superspeed reminiscent of the Flash, and his levels almost make you feel like you're in a racing game. When you hit the turbo on Dash, there's a solid sense of speed.

Teen Violet has the power of invisibility and force fields. While little is known of how her game style plays out, an earlier look at the game revealed Violet and Dash running through a level inside an invisible ball that Violet creates.

In some 18 diverse levels, *The Incredibles* promises to bring to life the film upon which it is based while remaining a legitimately fun game—an incredible feat if developer Heavy Iron can pull it off.

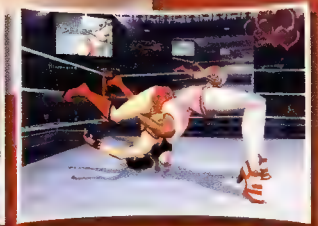
GMR SAYS → Check your cynicism at the door: This is one movie-based game that may break the "all movie games suck" mold.

→ HOW HOT...

"We're impressed... the game plays as good as it looks." – *PSM*

"Looks amazing... plays fantastic." – *Play Magazine* | "Face it. You've always wanted this." – *1up.com*

EVEN WHEN YOU LOSE, YOU WIN.



They're on top of you. You're on top of them. Does it really matter? All female wrestlers. 10,000 polygons per character. And hardcore wrestling gameplay. It's Rumble Roses and it's definitely a win-win situation.

RUMBLE ROSES

MATURE 17+
M
Sexual Themes
Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

PlayStation 2

KONAMI
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CONTROL FREAK

PHOTOS BY ARNOLD TIOSEJO

FALL IS THE SEASON FOR GETTING TO GRIPS WITH THE NEWEST IN CONTROLLERS

BY CHRISTIAN NUTT

A slew of brand-new wireless controllers have hit the market just in time for the holiday buying season. Just like game publishers, peripheral makers hope to grab your dollars as you flail about wildly in the mall, looking to buy some goodies.

So what should you get your hands on? Counting products still lingering on shelves from last year, there are far too many wireless controllers to sort through.

Fortunately, companies send us stacks of their latest products before they even hit the shelves, so we can spend hours struggling to slice open those damn plastic packages and cut our thumbs off in the process. Er, actually, so we can test them out and save you the bother of spending hundreds of dollars on controllers trying to find the one that's right for you.

DRIVING FORCE PRO

MANUFACTURER: **LOGITECH** COST: **$149.99**

***Gran Turismo 4* gamers have one obvious choice. Like its predecessor, which debuted with *Gran Turismo 3*, the latest wheel from Logitech has the Polyphony Digital stamp of approval and rugged construction.**

Of course, only the most serious racers will want to consider a wheel that costs $149.99. If you're even thinking about it, though, you might just want to trade in that old *GT3* wheel for the new model. Its shifter allows for spookily hardcore play, while the fully rubberized wheel means you won't lose your grip during even the shakiest force-feedback moments. And, hey, who can resist the bling of that *GT* logo in the center?

CORDLESS PRECISION CONTROLLER

MANUFACTURER: LOGITECH COST: $49.99

Logitech's previous attempts at wireless controllers for the PS2 and Xbox were notable for their quality—and their ridiculously large size.

The company has addressed the size issue, but the quality remains the same. The Xbox's Cordless Precision Controller features responsive buttons and a very solid feel—as it should for $49.99.

There's something slightly off, though, about the feel of the controller in your hands. The analog L and R do not have as much range of motion as Microsoft's stock Controller S, and the buttons are a little too close together for comfort. The raised directional pad is superior to the pack-in controller's, though, making it a better choice for bouts of *Guilty Gear X2 #Reload.*

CORDLESS ACTION CONTROLLER

MANUFACTURER: LOGITECH COST: $39.99

Logitech has finally succeeded in creating a wireless product that can compete with the PS2's packed-in controller for precision and comfort.

You may not want to throw away your DualShock 2 just yet—the Cordless Action Controller isn't quite perfect—but for almost all intents and purposes, it's a suitable stand-in for the stock pad.

The buttons and sticks are all properly placed, with a complete range of motion for the analogs and pleasantly pushable buttons. The one sore spot is the digital directional pad—it's recessed, meaning it's pretty useless for fighting games. Play anything else, though, and you won't notice. It's the Action Controller's only flaw, and it's a very slight one.

GMR PS2 PICK

RADIOWAVE

MANUFACTURER: SYLVANIA COST: $29.99

Best known for making light bulbs, Sylvania is a newcomer to the controller market. Perhaps the company should stick to what it knows.

Its cordless PS2 pad has some beginner's errors. Unlike the rest of the PS2 competition, the wireless receiver dangles from a cord. It doesn't typically get in the way of its functionality, but given the ultrasmall nugget Logitech's Cordless Action Controller sports, it's an unnecessary blemish.

The overall pad size is too big for any but the most gargantuan of hands, and the digital pad is an awkward circular dish. Functionally, the controller's just fine, and its comfy rubber grips make it easy for most to grab, but it's best recommended as a present for gamers with elephantitis of the hands.

XBOX MINI WIRELESS CONTROLLER

MANUFACTURER: INTEC COST: $39.99

Solid, sexy, small, and see-through, Intec's Mini Wireless Controller for Xbox easily rises to the top of the controller stakes.

It's a little bulbous and feels slightly odd at first. This is more of a visual blemish than a functional one, though. Work through it, because the controller's quite pleasant to play with.

The Xbox's pack-in Controller S may be smaller than the gigantic original pad, but it's still more rotund than a PS2 or GameCube controller. If you're looking for something even smaller, go Mini.

The Mini Wireless, unlike the rest of the controllers reviewed, has switches to control its vibration function on the pad itself, which is a neat option, and it features turbo as an added bonus. (Remember when that was a necessity?) Of course, it works great in general, which is why it gets the nod.

GMR XBOX PICK

PS2 MINI WIRELESS CONTROLLER

MANUFACTURER: INTEC COST: $34.99

The need for a mini Xbox pad is reasonably obvious. For the PS2, the subject is more debatable.

Intec's PS2 Mini Wireless Controller is too small for all but the sveltest of fingers. The construction is as solid and the options are as great as the Xbox edition. It just produces cramps in average-sized male hands after a reasonable play session.

If you've got tiny hands, though, you may want to give this one a look. It packs everything you need into a surprisingly small space, and the normal cross-shaped D-pad can be more useful in some instances than the PS2's separated one.

PS2 AIR FLO WIRELESS

MANUFACTURER: NYCO COST: $39.99

Nyko brings its Air Flo hand-cooling technology to the wireless realm. If you're a sufferer of Sweaty Hands Syndrome, this is the obvious choice.

The meaty rubber grips on the side provide great traction as the surprisingly powerful fan cools your hands. Gone will be the days of wiping your palms on your pants between rounds of *Soul Calibur II*.

The analog sticks are plasticky and the size of dinner plates, but that doesn't affect control much—it just feels strange. Strange, too, are the L2 and R2 buttons, which are angled away from L1 and R1.

There are no game-stopping flaws, but the controller feels just *off* from the norm enough to be relegated to the collections of those needing industrial-grade hand cooling. It's worth noting, however, that the Air Flo's huge body doesn't mean it's uncomfortable to come to grips with, unlike Sylvania's shiny blue behemoth.

10

Characters by Sony, Art Center, Photography by Andrew Mansson

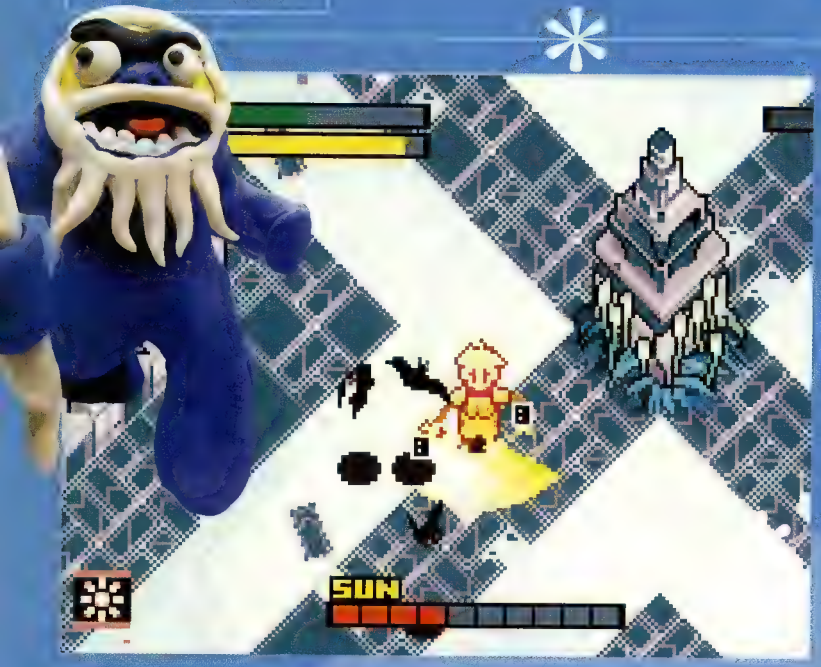
SEASON SLEEPERS

YOUR WAKE-UP CALL TO THE BEST GAMES YOU MIGHT OVERLOOK

Webster defines a "sleeper" as "one that achieves unexpected recognition or success."

This fall will see the release of some of the biggest, best, and undeniably most hyped games of all time. *Halo 2*, *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, *Half-Life 2*, and *Need for Speed Underground 2* are only a few of the big names, plus there's the debut of Nintendo's DS handheld. But what about the games that don't have multimillion-dollar marketing campaigns, big licenses, or characters who have been smiling back from the cover of every magazine on the planet for months? If history is any indication, some of them are in for a bumpy ride and a quick trip to the clearance racks. Just look at Ubisoft's critically acclaimed *Beyond Good & Evil*—last year it was selling for $15 within weeks of its release.

At *GMR*, it breaks our hearts to see good games suffer such cruel fates, which is why we're devoting a little extra love to 10 games that are most likely to end up unappreciated. Do yourself a favor and check out these great sleepers. You'll thank yourself for it.



Boktai 2: Solar Boy Django

SYS GBA | PUB. KONAMI | RATING T

WHAT IS IT, ANYWAY?

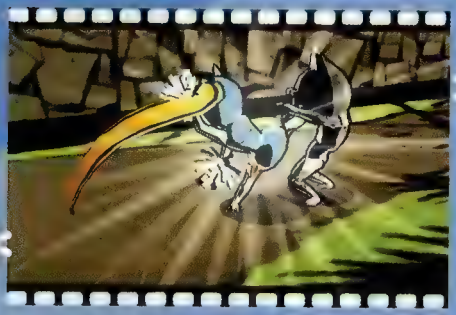
[illegible] *Zone of the Enders*] portable solar-powered vampire-hunting adventure.

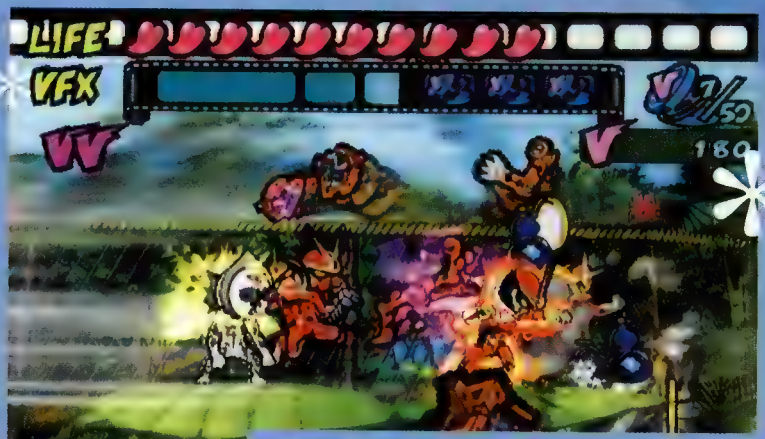
WHAT MAKES IT A SLEEPER?

With Nintendo's DS and Sony's PSP hogging the portable-gaming spotlight, the GBA has practically vanished into obscurity. Plus, completing the game requires constant exposure to sunlight—a tall order in many parts of the country given its late-October release date.

BUT YOU SHOULD PLAY IT BECAUSE:

Don't let the vampire-hunting theme fool you. *Boktai 2* is more *Metal Gear* than *Castlevania*, with tons of sneaking around and whacking enemies from behind. Unlike the original *Boktai* though, *Boktai 2* also has a heavy role-playing element thanks to a stat-building experience system. And the difficulty has been cranked way up. But if you're up for a challenge and don't mind getting a bit of a tan, *Boktai 2* is probably the best use for your GBA this fall.





Viewtiful Joe 2

SYS GC/PS2 | PUB. CAPCOM | RATING PENDING | PRICE $39.99

WHAT IS IT, ANYWAY?

Pure, stylish, beat-em-up action.

WHAT MAKES IT A SLEEPER?

Last year's *Viewtiful Joe* was a sleeper hit of sorts as well: It sold OK, but since its audience was limited to the GameCube (a PS2 port has only recently been released), many of you missed this gem. *VJ2* is destined for a wider release but may slip right past everyone who was deprived of the original.

BUT YOU SHOULD PLAY IT BECAUSE:

It's not every game that grades you on how cool your fighting techniques are, but *Viewtiful Joe 2* does just that. Combine this with its sophisticated yet retro graphics, clever time-warping skills, and expanded gameplay, and *VJ2* brings classic brawling action into the modern world. With style.


ALL FORMATS
strategies
Wizards of the Coast
PRIZES
LIVE CHOOL
TOURNAMENTS 24/7
customizable avatars
ALL MAGIC ALL THE TIME
MAGIC The Gathering
MAGIC The Gathering ONLINE
new sets released
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Taiko Drum Master

PUB NAMCO RATING E

WHAT IS IT, ANYWAY?

A rhythm-action game that challenges players to beat miniature (Japanese) *taiko* festival drums in time to music—including classical tunes, pop songs, and Namco game music. Think of it as *Donkey Konga*'s wacky exchange-student cousin.

WHAT MAKES IT A SLEEPER?

Music games without the letters *D*, *D*, and *R* in their titles tend to slip past without much attention these days. And with its odd aesthetics (which blend hyper-saccharine characters with traditional Japanese festival imagery), *Taiko Drum Master* is admittedly a hard sell for Americans.

BUT YOU SHOULD PLAY IT BECAUSE:

Unlike most music games, the challenge level in *Taiko Drum Master* isn't utterly insane, which means it's actually accessible for casual players. Plus, it involves hitting things really hard with a big pair of drumsticks. That's probably why it's incredibly popular in Japan. But more to the point, *Taiko Drum Master* is the only game on earth that combines Japanese festival drums, singing *takoyaki*, and Queen. If that doesn't stir your soul, something inside of you is dead.

Shin Megami Tensei: Nocturne

SYS PS2 PUB ATLUS RATING PENDING PRICE $69.99

WHAT IS IT, ANYWAY?

The latest in Atlus' cult-classic RPG series, featuring a heavy emphasis on negotiating with demons.

WHAT MAKES IT A SLEEPER?

The "Megaten" games (as hardcore fans know them) have been slow to catch on in America thanks to their occult overtones and offbeat, often obtuse gameplay. With *Nocturne* arriving right in the thick of the fall rush, it may be a hard sell to gamers waiting for *Halo 2*.

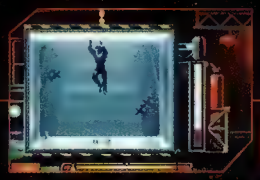
BUT YOU SHOULD PLAY IT BECAUSE:

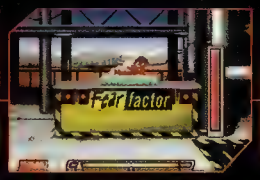
Nocturne is one of the most visually striking RPGs to date, perfectly capturing the sexy, stylish artwork of fan-favorite illustrator Kazuma Kaneko. It also sports intriguing gameplay; *Fable*'s big selling point is the choice between making your hero good or evil, but the Megaten series has been offering that for years.

DO YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO PLAY?

Fear factor UNLEASHED

FEAR FACTOR: UNLEASHED FOR GAME BOY ADVANCE PUTS YOU INSIDE THE ACTION OF THE HIT TELEVISION SERIES!

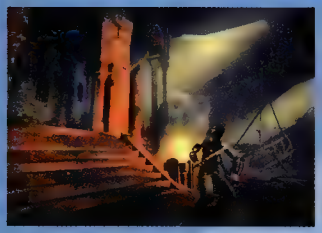




- Compete against a colorful cast of characters in 12 spine-tingling stunts
- Random phobias impact your ability to complete stunts
- Head-to-head competition for up to six players at a time
- Live-action video clips from the show on your GBA screen
- Control the Fear Meter and become the FFU Champion!

TEEN
T
Mild Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

NBC endemol hip games arush GAME BOY ADVANCE DC Studios



Prince of Persia: Warrior Within

SYS GC/PS2/XB PUB UBISOFT RATING M PRICE $39.

* WHAT IS IT, ANYWAY?

The stunning and graceful next iteration of designer Jordan Mechner's classic adventure series.

* WHAT MAKES IT A SLEEPER?

The Prince's 2003 return didn't sell nearly as well as anyone expected, finally breaking the million mark across all platforms when Ubisoft started giving away free copies of *Splinter Cell* along with it. The sequel faces even stiffer competition this holiday.

* BUT YOU SHOULD PLAY IT BECAUSE:

If you've ever seen the first game in action, this should be obvious. *Prince of Persia* is graphically stunning with fantastic controls that make complex moves easy, and playing it is like controlling a master martial artist. *Prince of Persia: Warrior Within* tones down the baggy pants and cranks up the intensity with amazing boss fights and even more impressive maneuvers. The slick, responsive controls should make it a nice counterpoint to *GTA*'s traditionally janky combat setup.

Otogi 3

XB PUB SEGA RATING T PRICE $39.99

* WHAT IS IT, ANYWAY?

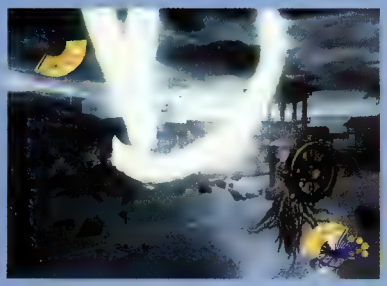
The ambitious follow-up to developer From Software's unexpected Xbox hit *Otogi*.

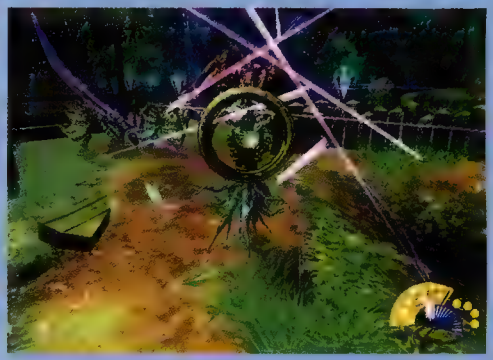
* WHAT MAKES IT A SLEEPER?

It's an Xbox-exclusive title, coming out in what is arguably the system's strongest season yet for exclusive titles. Not even *Otogi*'s immortal hero Raikoh can compete with the mind-blowing hype that has been strewn in the path of the likes of *Halo 2*, *Fable*, and *Knights of the Old Republic II*.

* BUT YOU SHOULD PLAY IT BECAUSE:

Raikoh may not be Master Chief, and he won't sprout little horns on his forehead if he breaks his neighbors' windows and divorces his wife, but he's a stylish undead warrior whose ancient adventures are sort of like a steroid-infused version of *Shinobi*. And for the sequel, he's brought friends—five additional warriors who join in on the demon-stomping mayhem. Fans of massive combos, flashy spells, and good old-fashioned hacking and slashing would be doing themselves a disservice by missing this one.



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Paper Mario: The Thousand-Year Door

SYS GC | PUB NINTENDO | RATING E | PRICE $49.99

* WHAT IS IT, ANYWAY?

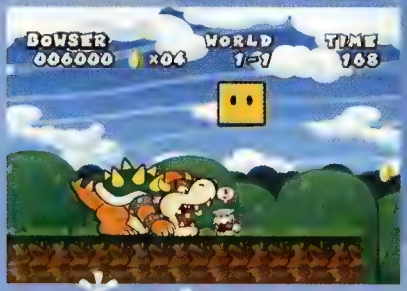
The latest take on the quirky *Mario RPG* franchise.

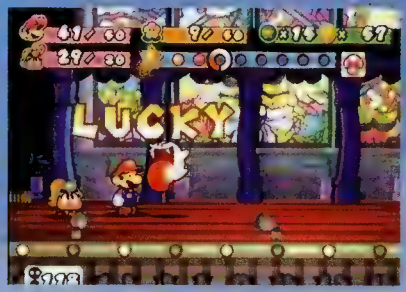
* WHAT MAKES IT A SLEEPER?

[illegible] out for the N64, a system that was pretty much dead at the time of the game's release. The GameCube is still very much alive, but the offbeat whimsy of Mario's new RPG is likely to be overlooked in the face of flashier fare like *Metroid Prime 2: Echoes*.

* BUT YOU SHOULD PLAY IT BECAUSE:

Nintendo has a real knack for creating accessible role-playing adventures without necessarily dumbing things down. Steeped in *Mario* tradition and graced with a typically amusing script, *Paper Mario 2*'s gameplay is as smooth and inventive as its graphics. A solid, action-oriented RPG with a classic Nintendo feel—what more could anyone ask for?





Katamari Damacy

SYS PS2 | PUB NAMCO | RATING E | PRICE $19.99

* WHAT IS IT, ANYWAY?

Pronounced ka-ta-ma-ry da-ma'-shee, this is the game that challenges you to roll everything in sight into a giant ball to shoot into space.

* WHAT MAKES IT A SLEEPER?

As a rule of thumb, most gamers don't buy software whose names they can't pronounce. And when those games have cows grazing in front of a rainbow on their covers...well, it's probably what you call a "doomed effort."

* BUT YOU SHOULD PLAY IT BECAUSE:

Most anyone who enjoys creative, original, and, most of all, fun games would find *Katamari Damacy* appealing. It's a bit hard to explain. The problem isn't that *KD* is complex—on the contrary, it's so simple that you never even press the controller's face buttons. Rather, it's so different than anything you've ever played before that you just have to experience it to understand. Clever, hilarious, stylish, imaginative, deceptively sophisticated, and sporting the best soundtrack all year, *KD* is just the thing for when you need a lighthearted breather between *GTA* killing sprees.

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MATURE 17+ M Blood Violence CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

PlayStation 2

PRODUCTION I.G

BANDAI®

Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War

PRICE $49.99

WHAT IS IT, ANYWAY?

An exquisitely detailed real-time strategy game based on the popular war-game miniature franchise.

WHAT MAKES IT A SLEEPER?

The RTS genre seems to have fallen into disfavor lately and no wonder—too many people are ripping off Blizzard (*WarCraft*, *StarCraft*) but failing to match its sense of inspiration. Plus, *Warhammer* has a built-in aura of "hardcore only," given that it's based on a line of war-game miniatures, a hobby so geeky that it makes videogaming look like naked coed skydiving in comparison.

BUT YOU SHOULD PLAY IT BECAUSE:

This isn't just *WarCraft*-come-lately. *Warhammer 40K* offers its own distinct approach to strategy gaming, with an emphasis on fighting over resource gathering and a knack for some serious large-scale warfare. Despite the epic size of the conflicts, though, the 3D world is rich with fine details. [illegible] is solid enough to entertain anyone.

Pikmin 3

SYS GC PUB NINTENDO RATING E PRICE $49.99

WHAT IS IT, ANYWAY?

It's the return of Shigeru Miyamoto's (*The Legend of Zelda*) gardening-inspired action-strategy game, now with no deadline and featuring more types of pikmin.

WHAT MAKES IT A SLEEPER?

Pikmin 2 is the sort of title most people don't realize they'd enjoy until they try it out. Those cute little flower creatures on the cover belie the depth of the gameplay. (Not to mention the deadly savagery of pikmin on the attack.)

BUT YOU SHOULD PLAY IT BECAUSE:

Like *Paper Mario 2*, the *Pikmin* series takes a complex, demanding genre (in this case, real-time strategy) and simplifies it to the point where anyone can enjoy it. A clever control scheme and a variety of challenging enemies keep the action fast and varied, and the removal of the 30-day time limit should appease gamers who found the original too rushed. Best of all are the pikmin themselves, who not only have new skills, but also hum their own theme song.

BUT WAIT. THERE'S MORE!
Of the hundreds of games shipping this holiday, there have to be more than 10 potential sleepers. Check out **GMRSLEEPERS.1UP.COM** for six more games that should be considered for your gift list.

Cut off behind enemy lines with no way to contact help, four young, barely trained soldiers realize their only hope for survival is to head into the heart of darkness. With few rations and dwindling ammunition, the only thing separating them from freedom is 100 miles of ruthless terrain, crawling with unseen enemies and filled with hidden booby traps. Welcome to Vietnam.

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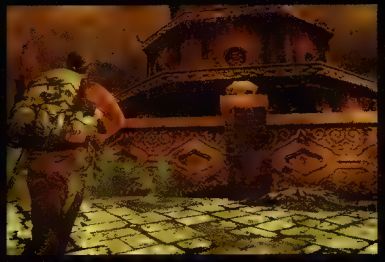
Get behind the wheel of Jeeps, tanks, helicopters, and river boats.



14 enormous missions in jungles, villages, temples, and underground tunnels.

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PlayStation®2 XBOX PIVOTAL GAMES SCi GAMES PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE GS™ GLOBAL STAR SOFTWARE

MATURE 17+ M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Strong Language
Suggestive Themes
Use of Drugs

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NOW

And so it begins. This month is packed with quality games, including two that scored an impressive 10 out of 10. Our cover story, *Need for Speed Underground 2*, did not fare quite as well, but still comes highly recommended. And if you think this month's review crop is murder on your wallet, don't forget next month: *GTA*, *Metroid*, *Halo*, *Metal Gear Solid*....

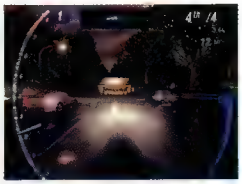
HOW WE RATE

WARNING!! WHERE MULTIPLE VERSIONS OF A GAME ARE REVIEWED, *GMR* WILL MENTION DIFFERENCES ONLY IF THEY SIGNIFICANTLY AFFECT THE GAMEPLAY.

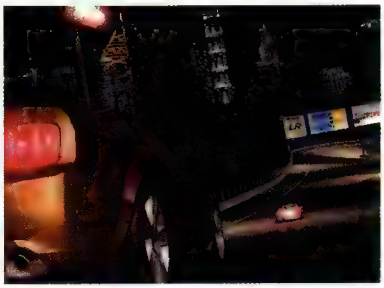
YOUR GUIDE TO THE GMR SCORING SYSTEM

1 AWFULNESS 2 DASTARDLY 3 PITIFUL 4 OOPS 5 AVERAGE 6 GOOD STUFF 7 RECOMMENDED 8 EXCELLENT 9 TOTALLY SICK 10 TIMELESS CLASSIC

REVIEWED THIS ISSUE:



→ Neon: for when your automobile just doesn't look enough like a Las Vegas strip club.



NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND 2

THE WORD ON THE STREET

TEEN | XB [REVIEWED] | GC | PS2

PUBLISHER:	ELECTRONIC ARTS
DEVELOPER:	EA CANADA
PRICE:	$49.99
RELEASE:	NOVEMBER
PLAYERS:	1-4 (ONLINE)
ORIGIN:	CANADA

Last year, we called the original *Need for Speed Underground* "the most exciting thing to happen to racing games in ages." Obviously, that was before we knew about *Burnout 3*. When EA picked up the rights to the *Burnout* franchise, and then when it eventually purchased Criterion (the developer of the *Burnout* series), two significant conflicts became apparent. Would the crossover appeal of *Burnout* and *NFSU2*, both high-speed and fast-paced racers, eat into each other's sales? And could *NFSU2* fend off not only the internal competition, not only other arcade racers like *OutRun 2*, and not only tuning simulators like *Gran Turismo 4*, but also a trio of arcade/tuning/underground-themed racers in *Juiced*, *Street Racing Syndicate*, and the especially feisty *Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition*? These indeed are exciting times.

Compared to its predecessor, *NFSU2* is more. More city, more courses, more cars, more parts, more style...just more of everything in general. The game is huge: The first five hours of racing in Bayview only amounts to 10 percent on the in-game progression meter, and opening up the fourth and final area of the city takes you to around 25 percent completion. The structure of the game's career mode doesn't stray too far off course: You begin with one car, and from there you must accrue funds by winning local races. Eventually, you will win the support and financial backing of a sponsor, which opens up even more races, autos, and upgrade possibilities. *NFSU2*'s career mode is illustrated in the style of a comic book, and the part of Rachel—Bayview's ruling race royalty—is played by professional pretty person Brooke Burke. Even though a comic-book motif suggests that some sort of narrative is present, little attention is given to why you're racing, aside from the usual "props."

But really, people need little reason to race other than to simply beat someone else to the finish line. Six types of races are available: drag,

→ Win more, unlock more. Not only must you upgrade your car's mechanics, but you have to keep it stylish in order to progress. Of course, just how stylish the tacky spinner rims are is debatable.

[VERSION CONTROL]

MARK IT X

While we recommend *NFSU2* across the board, if you own multiple consoles, we strongly suggest going with the Xbox version. The Controller S offers a better analog gas and brake compared to the DualShock, as well as a superior analog steering stick. The load times, on average, are quicker, and as expected, it also looks better with a faster framerate. Sadly, it doesn't support custom soundtracks, so we're all subjected to another largely bad EA Trax soundtrack, including the musical travesty that is "Riders on the Storm" from Snoop Dogg ("featuring the Doors"). Snoop, you know we love ya, but come on. *Featuring* the Doors?

sprint, circuit, drift, street X, and URL (Underground Racing League). The first three are based on racing through crowded city streets and freeways; the remaining three focus on the technical aspects. The majority of the game is fairly well balanced as far as ability and learning curve go, but the drag races are unusually difficult and demanding, while the deceptively easy drift races don't even need to be run technically well (or for that matter, to completion) in order to place first. This evens out about midway through the game, so it's not a big deal, but someone new to auto tuning might find initial frustration.

As races are won and sponsors are wooed, *NFSU2* gradually opens up all it has to offer. New sections of the city are unlocked, part suppliers are restocked with new equipment, and car dealerships put the latest models on the show floor. The pacing of unlockables is just right, as players aren't overwhelmed by a vast sea of brake pads, spinner rims, and manufacturer decals, nor are they stymied by having to race their stock NSX 240 for half of the game.

The biggest improvement is the addition of a garage, so you can now own and maintain multiple rides. Even though it has a physical location on the map, it can be immediately accessed at any time for vehicle switches, part swapping, or fine-tuning.

So even though it remains to be seen what *Midnight Club 3:DUB Edition* and *Gran Turismo 4* bring to the table, it's clear that *Need for Speed Underground 2* remains a unique experience that neither cannibalizes nor is cannibalized by any other racer this year. If you can't decide on one style of racer, thankfully *NFSU2* has a little bit of everything.

_Andrew Pfister

GMR HOT **9**/10

BETTER THAN: STREET RACING SYNDICATE
MISSING IN ACTION: JUICED
WAIT FOR IT: MIDNIGHT CLUB 3: DUB EDITION

2ND OPINION

NFSU2 takes last year's awesome game and jacks it up by about 400 degrees. It's got everything you'd ever want in a racing game: great graphics, awesome control, online play, übercustomization, and Brooke Burke. It's hard to beat that combination, methinks.

_James Mielke

NIGHTMARE OF DRUAGA

GO TO SLEEP

EVERYONE | PS2

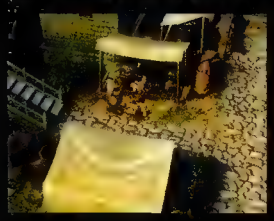
Remember how great *Tower of Druaga* was on NES? How it's so fondly remembered that Namco has put nods to it in a significant portion of its games over the last few years? No? Oh, right, that all happened in Japan—the game never even came out in the United States. Now you start to see the problem with *Nightmare of Druaga*, a game designed solely and specifically to appeal to nostalgia-addled fans, released in a country where that nostalgia doesn't exist.

Taken on its own merits, *Nightmare of Druaga* doesn't do much that dozens of other dungeon crawlers (many of them, like *Chocobo's Mysterious Dungeon* and *Torneko: The Last Hope*, also by Chun Soft) haven't already established. As the hero Gil, you proceed ever deeper in a search for the princess Ki, all while picking up ever-better equipment and gaining levels. Barring the item synthesis parts (which don't depart much from the same thing done in a number of other games), it's pretty rote. You fight the same palette-swapped enemies, stay confined to a rigid grid setup for movement, and find roughly one complete new set of armor per dungeon.

If you don't get tired of playing every single "get as far as you can, run back to town, get a little farther" dungeon RPG in creation, then *Nightmare of Druaga* may appeal to you. It's not badly done, exactly—it just lacks anything resembling a new spin or take on the genre. Classic dungeon-crawl fans thirsting for something staid should be pleased, however.

That's because the game does a reasonable job of what it sets out to do—provide dungeon crawling and get *Druaga* fans hot—but it's safe to say that this won't be kick-starting a new wave of *Druaga* nostalgia in the United States.

_Nich Maragos



PUB	NAMCO	PRICE	$39.95
DEV	CHUN SOFT	PLAYERS	1
REL	OCTOBER	ORIGIN	JAPAN

GMR DUNGEON **5/10**

BETTER THAN: TOWER OF DRUAGA
NOT AS GOOD AS: DARK CLOUD 2
WOULD HAVE MADE: A GOOD BONUS

MEN OF VALOR

I AIN'T NO FORTUNATE SON

MATURE | XB [REVIEWED] | PC

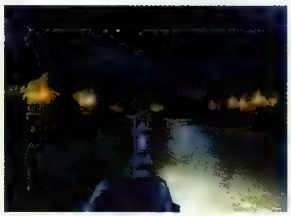
With nine similarly themed first-person shooters out this year alone, the Vietnam War is the new "it" conflict. Most of these titles induce shell shock in even the most dedicated war buffs (you listenin', Eidos? We're talking to YOU!). *Men of Valor*, though, is more than just some name on a wall—it's actually a decent game. That has something to do with the development team, 2015, which splintered from EA after creating *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault*. What you get is an Oliver Stone–directed theme-park ride.

The single-player game does a good job of conveying the madness of the era. One minute, you're throwing a football and talking to buddies as music plays on the radio. The next—BLAM!—artillery fire explodes and you're running for cover. *Men of Valor* (like *Call of Duty*, like any of the *Medal of Honor* games, and so on) is goosed by all these cinematic moments. Ambushes replete with exploding cows, more cursing in the dialogue than a Da Nang hooker—you name it, this game's got it.

The lush jungle foliage and decent graphics are another high point. While there are walls of green that push you down a path, at least it doesn't feel like it. But it's time to start popping smoke, 'cause the A.I. screams, "Medic!" Sometimes your squadmates flank and cover your six, but most of the time, these men of unintelligent valor rely so heavily on scripted scenes that you might as well go it Rambo-style. They wait for you to hit some trigger point to follow or move ahead. There are times when GIs walk up to VC and you'll swear they are about to curtsy each other. Shoot, dammit! Of course, the entire NVA is only aiming at you half the time. Even when other American soldiers are nearby. Even when you're crawling through the grass. Even when you're 100 yards away, hiding. They are still. Shooting. At. You.

The multiplayer, mercifully, leaves no man behind. There are different soldier classes (rated with different armor and movement rates) to choose from and a couple interesting game modes that are twists on capture the flag. But, much like "the Nam" itself, the wonky bots in the single-player experience make this a lopsided victory at best.

_Darren Gladstone



PUB	VU GAMES	PRICE	$49.99
DEV	2015	PLAYERS	1-12 (ONLINE)
REL	OCTOBER	ORIGIN	U.S.A.

GMR CHARLIE DON'T SURF! **7/10**

VIETNAM: THE NEW "POPULAR" WAR
SCRIPTED EVENTS: STILL KINDA COOL
BETTER THAN: VIETCONG, PURPLE HAZE

MIDWAY ARCADE TREASURES 2

PRESS START TO CONTINUE

MATURE | PS2 [REVIEWED] | GC. | XB

Midway's first *Arcade Treasures* disc was successful enough to warrant a sequel, and the company has since ported more of its hotter arcade games. Notable titles include *A.P.B.*, *Arch Rivals*, *Championship Sprint*, *Rampage World Tour*, *Hard Drivin'*, *NARC*, *Total Carnage*, and *Xenophobe*, while others such as *Pit Fighter*, *Kozmik Krooz'r*, *Primal Rage*, and *Timber* fill out the disc. Each game is emulated flawlessly, though some are better suited to their original arcade cabinets than others—*A.P.B.* and *Championship Sprint*, for instance, suffer greatly without a steering wheel, and that classic dungeon crawl *Gauntlet II* loses much of its charm when players can add infinite quarters (read: unlimited health) by simply pressing a button.

Mortal Kombat II and *3* are the premier titles of the disc, though the original is not included because it appears on the collector's edition of *Mortal Kombat: Deception*.

Controllers can be configured and other settings saved to a memory card, and Xbox Live users can post their high scores online. There's also bonus artwork, arcade-cabinet information, and even launch kits, one of which hypes *Mortal Kombat* as "the most successful title in the history of our industry." Interviews with the original developers are here, too, though almost all of them suffer from dreadful audio.

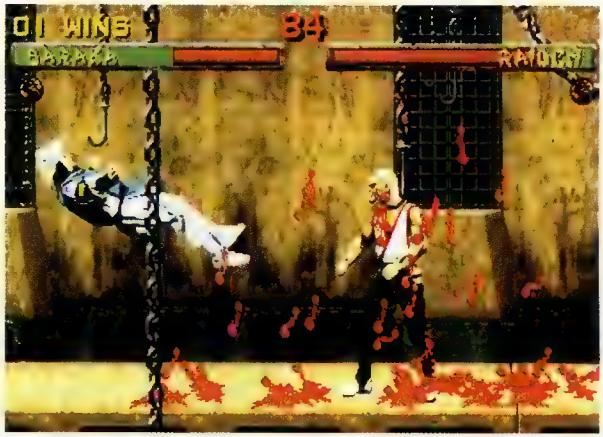
Playing these titles reveals the tenet of many past coin-ops all too well: Generate revenue by killing the player quickly and often. Though the nostalgia of playing wears off quickly, for only 20 bucks, you really can't go wrong.

_Doug Trueman

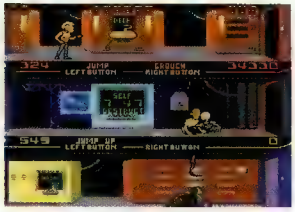
PUB	MIDWAY	PRICE	$19.99
DEV	DIGITAL ECLIPSE	PLAYERS	1-4
REL	OCTOBER	ORIGIN	U.S.A.

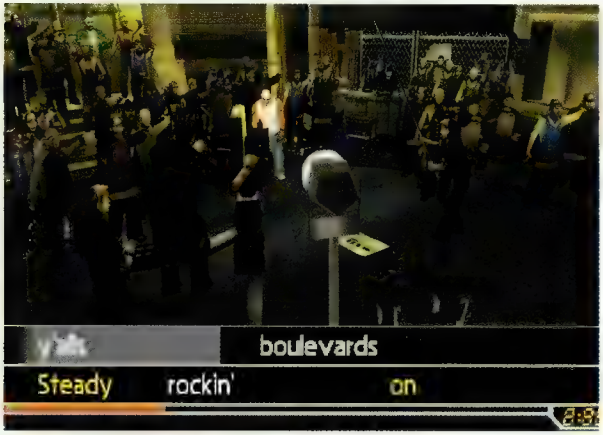
GMR 6/10 FREE PLAY

NOT AS GOOD AS: YOU REMEMBER
LIGHTER THAN: A ROLL OF QUARTERS
WAIT FOR IT: GAMERS NOSTALGIC FOR HALF-LIFE 2



→ *Mortal Kombat II* is obviously the star here, but gamers interested in the upcoming controversial *NARC* revival might want to check out the original to see what the game was like: two cops in football helmets slaughtering junkies and running over clowns outside a porno theater. You know, before it got all *weird*.





PUB	EIDOS INTERACTIVE	PRICE	$49.99 ($59.99 W/MIC)
DEV	ARTIFICIAL MIND & MOVEMENT	PLAYERS	1-4
REL	AVAILABLE NOW	ORIGIN	U.S.A.

GMR 3/10 LOSE YOURSELF

LESS EMBARRASSING THAN: ACTUALLY RAPPING
NOT AS GOOD AS: KARAOKE REVOLUTION
MADE FOR: EMINEM WANNABES

GET ON DA MIC

CHANNEL YOUR INNER SLIM SHADY

EVERYONE | PS2

Rap is about the only genre Konami's *Karaoke Revolution* has left untouched. There's good reason for this, though, since the games judge on pitch accuracy, and rap has little to do with an ability to hit notes. Eidos Interactive saw a large demographic being left out, however, and teamed with Artificial Mind & Movement to create *Get on da Mic*.

Karaoke Revolution is sometimes criticized for being little more than a glorified karaoke machine, but *Get on da Mic* better deserves that description. The game technically "judges" but does not look for anything more than noise in the microphone. Gamers can just as easily score well by having a conversation with the person next to them as they can by following the onscreen lyrics.

Additionally, there are fundamental problems with the way *Get on da Mic* presents lyrics. Instead of text flowing along a single line, imagine two lines constantly refreshed during a song. Rap often moves at an extremely fast pace, which makes keeping up with each set of lines difficult. Even if players know a song front to back, the pace is awkward and destroys a sense of rhythm.

There's a wild assortment of music for rap fans, whether you're a fan of Snoop Dogg, Sir Mix-A-Lot, or Tupac Shakur. *Get on da Mic* features 40 different covers, which is impressive, compared to *Karaoke Revolution* volume 1's 36. Strangely, though, the covers don't feature every lyric.

It's hard to completely fault the problems in *Get on da Mic*. For its ambitious goal, it does pretty well. Unfortunately, rap in videogame form is boring and stale, despite all the window dressing of game modes and options found within this title. Genre fans might be entertained, but since *Mic* lacks any real replay value, *Karaoke Revolution* remains the life of the party.

_Patrick Klepek

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RATCHET & CLANK: UP YOUR ARSENAL

IF IT AIN'T BROKE, ADD MULTIPLAYER

TEEN | PS2

Insomniac Studios, the development house behind *Ratchet & Clank* and *Spyro the Dragon*, promised its most ambitious undertaking yet with the announcement of the latest in the *Ratchet* series: more than 60 weapons, online gaming, and a compelling single-player adventure. It was a tall order, but the company delivered in every imaginable respect.

Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal continues the adventure of the crafty Ratchet and his robotic sidekick Clank. The two are joined by Captain Qwark from earlier in the series and are pitted against the mechanical Dr. Nefarious, a robot intent on destroying all organic life in the galaxy. Aiding Nefarious is an army of dim-witted tyhrranoids and a robotic riff on Britney Spears, complete with lethal backup dancers and a remix of her infectious tunes.

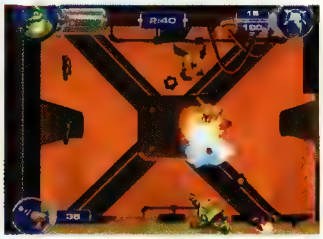
As in the previous titles, Ratchet begins as a humble mechanic but acquires enough firepower to level a small planet. Clank remains unchanged throughout, ordering his collection of robotic assistants and a banana-obsessed monkey to lower force fields and attack enemies. Captain Qwark is a playable character in a series of two-dimensional side-scrolling comic books that retrace his rise to (and fall from) glory.

Insomniac has spent the past year tinkering with its weapon arsenal, and it shows. There are dozens of guns in the game, all of which can be upgraded four times. For instance, over the course of its evolution, a simple rocket-propelled grenade gains a target lock, homing capabilities, mines, and finally a volley of homing missiles. Other gadgets include a rift inducer that creates black holes and another that disguises Ratchet as a tyhrranoid. Advanced players can earn rewards by completing optional missions, finding hidden areas, or performing other thumb-blistering deeds. The entire game can even be played as either a third-person adventure title or a first-person shooter.

Finally, Insomniac has included many multiplayer and online modes, all of which feature on-foot and vehicular battles. Online gaming supports the USB headset, clans, quick matches, skins, and player rankings and statistics. The framerate never lags, even with eight players turning one another into sheep.

While *Ratchet* might lack the artistry of *The Legend of Zelda* or the challenge of *Ninja Gaiden*, it's hard to find fault with *Up Your Arsenal*. The controls are flawless, the weapons are diverse, and the production values are some of the highest in the industry. Fans of action games can't go wrong.

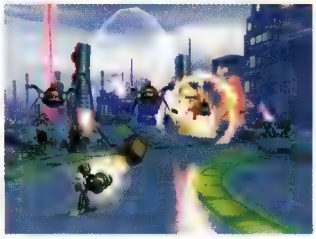
_Doug Trueman



2ND OPINION

Two things really got me about *Up Your Arsenal*: It's almost painfully addictive—continually rewarding you with new weapons, armor, and upgrades—and it's funny as hell. Doug may like *Zelda* more, but in my book there's no better platformer.

_Joe Rybicki
Senior editor, *OPM*

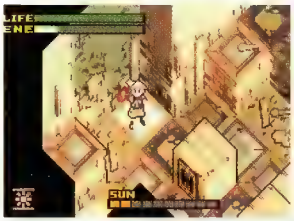


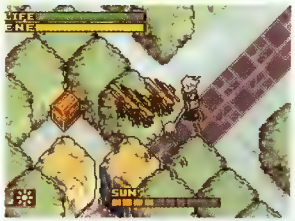
→ Outlandishly creative weaponry has always been a hallmark of the *Ratchet & Clank* games, and *Up Your Arsenal*, as the title might suggest, takes it one step further. With every weapon having four functions, the fun does not stop.

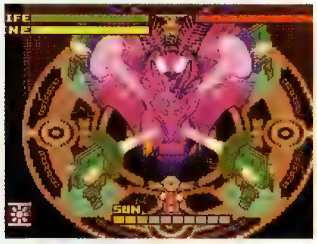
PUB	SCEA	PRICE	$39.99
DEV	INSOMNIAC	PLAYERS	1-8 (ONLINE)
REL	NOVEMBER	ORIGIN	U.S.A.

GMR UP A NOTCH 10/10

ON PAR WITH: THE WIND WAKER
BETTER THAN: GOING COMMANDO
WAIT FOR IT: CONKER: LIVE & RELOADED







→ When it comes to the Immortals, solar power's the only way to seal the deal. Make sure you're stocked on health and sunlight before giving it a shot, lest they scuttle back to whence they came.

BOKTAI 2: SOLAR BOY DJANGO

HEY NOW, IT'S THE SUN, AND IT MAKES ME SMILE

TEEN | GBA

PUBLISHER:	KONAMI
DEVELOPER:	KONAMI
PRICE:	$39.99
RELEASE:	OCTOBER
PLAYERS:	1
ORIGIN:	JAPAN

Those who passed on *Boktai* may have made the right call. That gem was unique, gorgeous, and a hoot to handle. But this more expansive and finely tuned sequel takes all that was great about its predecessor and finesses the formula while losing none of the charm.

Players once again don the crimson scarf of Django, pint-sized vampire hunter. Creator Hideo Kojima's discerning eye for detail is apparent throughout—every aspect of the hardware has been carefully considered. Django's ability to scope out the surrounding area and quickly switch weapons and upgrades on the fly—both copped from Solid Snake's repertoire—help create an experience far deeper than most handheld games could hope to offer. The controls remain perfect, and while the visual upgrades may appear moderate at best, deft usage of color and lighting effects make this one of the best-looking handheld games to date.

With more than 60 weapons to collect and wield—and the option to craft new ones—as well as upgradeable stats, players can customize their approach accordingly. A bigger cast of characters and conflicts (not to mention San Miguel, the game's central hub town) adds just the right amount of depth to the sweet 'n' simple story line. And while the game's big gimmick—a built-in solar sensor that affects near every aspect of the game—is still the main attraction, it's not as unforgiving in its implementation as before. It's not a stretch to think that for Kojima—as with his *Substance* edition of *Metal Gear Solid*—*Boktai 2* is the game he really set out to make. While the trappings of something timeless were all in place with his first solar-powered outing, with this follow-up he's brought an even more memorable world to life.

_David Chen

GMR SPF 40 **9**/10

BETTER THAN: BOKTAI: THE SUN IS IN YOUR HANDS
BEST PLAYED IN: SUMMER
WAIT FOR IT: METAL GEAR ACID

2ND OPINION

Boktai 2 is geared toward hardcore fans of the original game. The new weapon and inventory systems boost the challenge, while the RPG elements and increased reliance on sunlight further add to the complexity. Newcomers may find it more daunting than fun.

_Jeremy Parish
Features editor, 1UP.com

CALL OF DUTY: UNITED OFFENSIVE

NAZIS. WE HATE THESE GUYS

MATURE | PC

Even after all these years and all these games based on World War II, one thing never seems to get old: giving Hitler and his crackpot regime what for. The original *Call of Duty* puts you on a heavily scripted movie-caliber roller-coaster ride with moments that have you jumping out of your seat. The new expansion, *Call of Duty: United Offensive*, delivers more of the same and tops it off with a few neat additions that are worth reenlisting for.

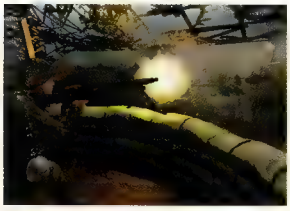
The first thing you'll notice is that there is a whole other honest-to-God single-player game here. Again, you're playing as American (Riley), British (Doyle), and Russian (Yuri) soldiers. The American campaign through the Battle of the Bulge isn't anything that you haven't seen before (since it was included in the first game), but it's still good, challenging, and very tense, especially toward the end.

Things start getting interesting with the British campaign. Flying in high over Rotterdam for a bombing run, you need to fend off the Luftwaffe. While it is, technically, a rail shooter, it's quite a rail you're riding. Your fellow gunners are getting shot at, and you need to cover their stations; fires are flaring, and you need to put them out. The Russian campaign is equally frenzied. Retaking factories and train stations is one thing, but rolling through the countryside is fun and mercifully easy to control.

While we're fixating on vehicles, we need to point out that they've been smartly integrated into a new multiplayer mode. Jeeps will tote three people and quickly ferry them to checkpoints. While they do have rear-mounted .50-caliber machine guns, they still can't take a hit from the heavy and light tanks that also populate the maps. You have only a total of six vehicles, but they are all effective and add to the fun.

So is this game worth the money? Let's put it this way: Even at the more difficult settings, it took most people about nine hours to finish *Call of Duty: United Offensive* was beaten in seven. Tack onto that a full multiplayer mode with vehicles, and, considering the price, you have a bargain on your hands.

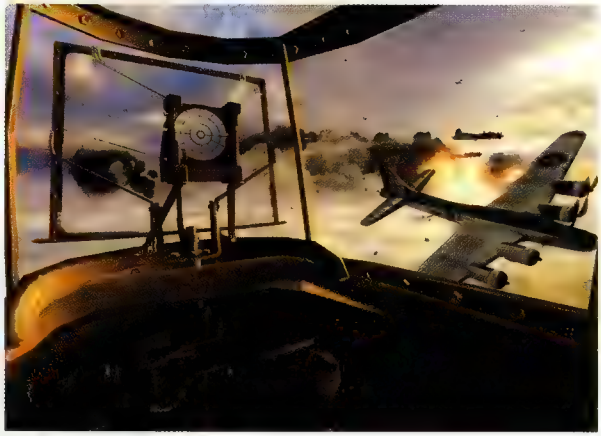
_Darren Gladstone



PUB	ACTIVISION	PRICE	$29.99
DEV	GRAY MATTER	PLAYERS	1-32 (ONLINE)
REL	AVAILABLE NOW	ORIGIN	U.S.A.

GMR VICTORY 8/10

BETTER THAN: BATTLEFIELD 1942: ROAD TO ROME
FINALLY: A SOLID EXPANSION FOR AN FPS
WAIT FOR IT: MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT



THE BARD'S TALE

YOU HAVE FOUND 20 COMEDY GOLD

TEEN | PS2 [REVIEWED] | XB

Early incarnations of *The Bard's Tale* consisted of revered first-person role-playing games in the mid-'80s. The series is back, this time as a single-player action-RPG. It's akin to *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance* and *Champions of Norrath* in the same way that *Scary Movie* relates to *Scream*—parodies and humor definitely rule the day in this title.

As the protagonist, the Bard isn't a dashing, chivalrous hero with a heart of gold. Rather, he's a horny, selfish twit who's in the wrong place at the right time. He's never at a loss for insults, and the world around him is equally daft. When a bunch of drunks break out into song in the first five minutes, you know you're in for a strange trip—one where you'll be cracking up constantly.

The Bard's move set doesn't differ much from other entries in the genre; he fights with both melee and ranged weapons, he can jump, and he uses an experience system. His forte is summoning allies and creatures with his handy lute, while his weakness is the primitive nature of his equipment. Almost everything you find on the field of battle is immediately converted to currency, and the number of items you can equip in total is very low. It's the opposite of games such as *Champions of Norrath*, in which you have near-endless options for what helmet to wear or accoutrement to wield. While a lot can be said for the sheer amount of stuff those games tend to offer, *Bard* is refreshingly simple.

You won't find staples such as multiplayer or online support in *The Bard's Tale*, either. This puts added pressure on the story to keep you hooked. While it's stronger than anything comparable, it can't compensate for all that's missing. A parody movie (if done correctly) is usually over after 90 minutes, while this game is meant to last thousands.

It's about time this overly serious genre gets the ol' "Kick Me" sign stuck to its back, and it's here that *The Bard's Tale* shines. It's shamelessly hilarious, leaving no topic or genre stereotype sacred. However, after a few hours guffawing at the Bard's plight, you'll likely push it aside for the next "real" action-RPG.

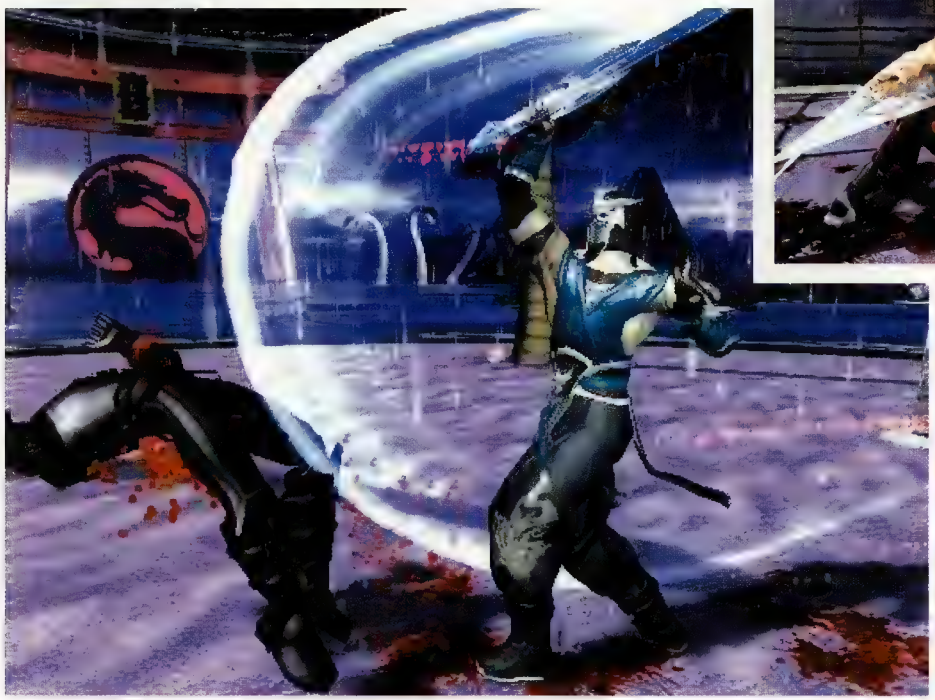
_Justin Leeper

PUB	VIVENDI UNIVERSAL	PRICE	$49.99
DEV	INXILE ENTERTAINMENT	PLAYERS	1
REL	NOVEMBER	ORIGIN	U.S.A.

GMR LAUGH-TASTIC 7/10

BETTER THAN: HUNTER: THE RECKONING
NOT AS GOOD AS: BALDUR'S GATE: DARK ALLIANCE II
WAIT FOR IT: CHAMPIONS: RETURN TO ARMS

→ Like in *Deadly Alliance*, each character in *Deception* has three fighting styles they can switch between at will. It adds a new dimension to the characters we haven't seen in years, like with Sindel and Baraka.



MORTAL KOMBAT: DECEPTION

YOU WILL DIE, MORTAL

MATURE | XB [REVIEWED] | PS2

PUBLISHER: MIDWAY
DEVELOPER: MIDWAY
PRICE: $49.99
RELEASE: AVAILABLE NOW
PLAYERS: 1-2 (ONLINE)
ORIGIN: U.S.A.

Just when it looked like *Mortal Kombat* was bleeding to death in a spiked pit of irrelevancy, Midway successfully pulled it into the third dimension with 2002's *Deadly Alliance*. But while the combo-heavy 3D fighting was a big step forward for the series, the gore-soaked silliness of the earlier games seemed gone for good. That changes with *Mortal Kombat: Deception*, which keeps *Deadly Alliance*'s solid gameplay while making everything bigger and bloodier than before.

Deception introduces a few new faces, such as female Raiden clone Ashrah and stupidly named Kobra. But the real focus is on returning characters, such as old favorites Scorpion and Mileena (and not-so-favorites Kabal and Nightwolf), all of whom bring their old special moves with them. *Deception* even retools the fighting system a little, adding a reversal system that lets players parry attacks.

With an eye for dark, grotesque humor, *Deception* raises the bar for creative killing. Each fighter has a couple of fresh, bloody fatalities this time around; plus, new suicide moves let them steal satisfaction from an opponent. All stages also feature environmental fatality options. If the arcade and versus modes start to wear on you, *Deception* also features the unique Chess Kombat, as well as a blatant *Puzzle Fighter* rip-off starring *MK* characters. If you want depth, though, try Konquest, a simple but surprisingly long RPG/training/challenge mode that players must complete to earn all of the secret characters.

"The same thing, but more of it" is a formula that's worked well in the past for *MK* games, and it works well here. *Deception* is excellent, and its online play and hundreds of unlockable secrets give it more longevity than most fighters.

_Mikel Reparaz

GMR KRAZY **8**/10

ON PAR WITH: DEAD OR ALIVE 3
NOT AS GOOD AS: VIRTUA FIGHTER 4: EVOLUTION
WAIT FOR IT: SOUL CALIBUR 3

2ND OPINION

All the value-added features (chess, puzzle, and online kombat) make this the ultimate toy chest for bloodthirsty *MK* fans, but the underlying fighting game still can't hang with the likes of *Soul Calibur II*, *Virtua Fighter 4*, or even *Dead or Alive*.

_Shane Bettenhausen
Previews editor *EGM*

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KARAOKE REVOLUTION VOL. 3

IT TAKES TWO, BABY

EVERYONE | PS2

There hasn't been much incentive for Konami and Harmonix to improve upon the successful *Karaoke Revolution* formula for each installment, but surprisingly, the third volume includes features that rocket its entertainment value to an entirely unparalleled level.

This time around, embarrassment doesn't have to be a solo affair; two people can sing their hearts out together. *Volume 3* introduces duets, a feature sorely lacking from the series since the start. Several tracks are in "duet format," through which each player sings a different vocal line (i.e., one male and female singer). Unfortunately, some songs (such as the B-52's "Love Shack") are vocally one sided, leaving only a few scant lines for the gamer with the other vocals. The other duet option involves trading lines, which is actually more fun and usable with any song.

Duets may seem like such an obvious feature, but it literally multiplies the amount of fun gamers will pull away from their karaoke experiences. Combined with a great array of music to pick from, *Volume 3* comes away as the best release in the series yet.

Complaints over the overindulgence in country music from the last game disappear in *Volume 3*; there is a fantastic balance between rock, pop, R&B, and classics. It's tough to argue against a game that lets you simultaneously imitate both David Bowie and Freddy Mercury. Plus, since everyone loves being Michael Jackson, *Volume 3* tosses in not only an all-time favorite ("Beat It"), but an old-school MJ tune ("ABC"), too. *Karaoke Revolution* has always aspired to be the ultimate party game, but for the first time, it truly has everything it needs to be exactly that. Do not miss out.

_Patrick Klepek

PUB	KONAMI OF AMERICA	PRICE	$39.99
DEV	HARMONIX	PLAYERS	1-8
REL	NOVEMBER	ORIGIN	U.S.A.

GMR 9/10 PITCH PERFECT

BETTER THAN: KARAOKE REVOLUTION VOLUME 1, 2
FINALLY FEATURES: DAVID BOWIE
GETS BETTER WITH: PROPER "REFRESHMENTS"

KARAOKE REVOLUTION

TIME TO ROCK THE MIC

EVERYONE | XB

Microsoft cornered Xbox's karaoke market with the all-encompassing *Xbox Music Mixer*, but with *Karaoke Revolution* appearing on the market simultaneously, even if on a different platform, and jazzed with more features, Microsoft's efforts fizzled. Thankfully, though, Harmonix's innovative game has now arrived on Xbox.

Xbox owners aren't receiving sloppy seconds, however, as 10 exclusive Motown tracks and selections from *Karaoke Revolution Volume 2* have been mixed into this installment. The additions are mostly classics, but there is enough contemporary music already. More Avril Lavigne wouldn't get Mom and Dad to pick up an extra copy of *Karaoke Revolution* for the family party, anyway.

Following in the footsteps of *DDR Ultramix*, this version has Xbox Live support. It should help bridge the gap between this and the several other *Karaoke Revolution* games already available, but sadly, it won't make duets, a superb addition to the PlayStation 2's third release, suddenly appear on Xbox.

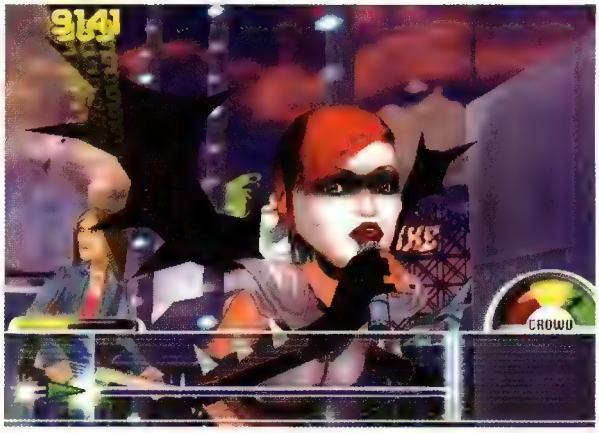
Gamers who have already loosened up their vocal chords on *Karaoke Revolution* won't have much reason to give this version a peek, but Xbox owners have a well-rounded first entry into the series to test their talents. With all of the additions, *Karaoke Revolution* on the Xbox comes out with the most diverse music selection of any installment. The featured pop songs might not be burning up the charts anymore, but that doesn't take away from the sheer variety. Despite the lacking modes, the new songs and Xbox Live make *Karaoke Revolution* on Xbox incredibly versatile.

_Patrick Klepek

PUB	KONAMI OF AMERICA	PRICE	$39.99
DEV	HARMONIX	PLAYERS	1-8
REL	NOVEMBER	ORIGIN	U.S.A.

GMR 8/10 REPEAT

BETTER THAN: XBOX MUSIC MIXER
DOESN'T HAVE: DUETS
GREAT FOR: OLDIES FANS



→ At last, Konami's propensity to extend the lives of its music games is married to Xbox Live's downloadable content ability. Details regarding the first song downloads remain unknown, but we can imagine that tracks from the PS2 Volumes 2 and 3 will be offered to bring Xbox users up to speed.

→ Non-PS2 players, beware. Once again, only the PS2 version features online play and face-mapping features, plus it has the ideal control setup on stock controllers, making it the best version to buy, hands down. The continued lack of Xbox Live support, regardless of the reasoning behind it, remains a disappointment.

GMR ESSENTIAL SELECTION

TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND 2

A MAN AND HIS BOARD

TEEN | PS2 [REVIEWED] | GC | XB

PUBLISHER:	ACTIVISION
DEVELOPER:	NEVERSOFT
PRICE:	$49.99
RELEASE:	OCTOBER
PLAYERS:	1-8 (ONLINE)
ORIGIN:	U.S.A.

Last year, *Tony Hawk's Underground* successfully retooled the *Tony Hawk* franchise by adding a story mode and offering tons of customization options, much to the delight of skateheads everywhere. Neversoft's goal this year is to make an equally big splash with *Tony Hawk's Underground 2*. Tough task, but the developer pulled it off by adding some solid new moves and levels and making a couple of key additions.

Most notably, *THUG2* treats gamers to a delicious classic mode, which matches the story mode in terms of goals (as in well over 100) and trumps it when it comes to levels. See, while both share the half dozen or so new cities to explore—you get to grind past sun-bathing beauties in Sydney and chuck apples at Bostonian loudmouths—classic mode makes use of the *Tony Hawk* wayback machine to deliver such classic levels as downhill jam and the school. Gamers weaned on PS1 *Hawks* will shed a tear, while newer fans will get a lesson on how things started, as the two-minute timer, secret tapes, and high-score goals all return.

Almost as impressive is seeing Neversoft on creative overdrive. Spend some time in the story mode, and you can find two hidden characters per level, some with unique rides. Beat the game, and you can open up even more playable characters, as well as a couple of impressive levels. And as for the oft-mentioned story mode, it feels like a follow-up episode to last year's but with the whole World Destruction Tour slant—enjoyable and funny, it'll keep gamers interested enough to get through it. *THUG2* may not match *THUG*'s charm and novelty, but it's still one of the most addictive and satisfying experiences out there.

_Greg Ford

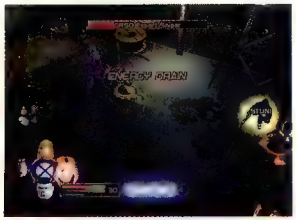
GMR GRINDING 9/10

BETTER THAN ANY OTHER EXTREME-SPORTS GAME NOT AS GOOD AS SKATING FOR REAL WHY ISN'T XBOX LIVE SUPPORTED?

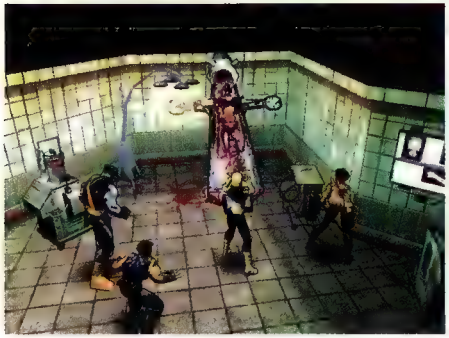
2ND OPINION

With create-a-anything intact, the *Jackass*-flavored brand of humor, and now the addition of *THPS* classic stages, this is indeed the most value-packed installment of the series. But there's not much that's new—just a lot more—and after six games in six years, the question remains: How much *Tony Hawk* is too much?

_Andrew Pfister



→ Whether you play by yourself or with three friends, you'll always see four merry mutants of your choosing onscreen, and a simple tap of the D-pad switches between them.



X-MEN LEGENDS

THE BEST X EVER

TEEN | PS2 [REVIEWED] | GC | XB

PUBLISHER:	ACTIVISION
DEVELOPER:	RAVEN SOFTWARE
PRICE:	$49.99
RELEASE:	AVAILABLE NOW
PLAYERS:	1–4
ORIGIN:	U.S.A.

By the time you hit *X-Men Legends*' first flashback mission, you realize one thing: The guys at developer Raven Software are total Marvel geeks. And this is a very good thing. Raven hasn't just taken a popular license and made a game out of it—it's completely embraced the opportunity to work with a property it obviously loves as much as its game's intended audience. It ain't perfect, bub, but *Legends* certainly provides one of gaming's best and most unique superheroic experiences.

That's not to say, however, that its action-RPG gameplay feels unique. If you've played the likes of *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance*, you basically know what to expect from *Legends*. Just imagine berzerker rages and optic blasts in place of sword slashes and magic missiles—and it works quite well. Though it does seem odd to need to power up your X-Men as they gain experience, by the time your 15 (yes, 15!) heroes unlock their full potential—from the brute strength of Wolverine and Rogue to the finesse of Jean Grey and Nightcrawler—you really feel like a badass.

Unfortunately, the game lacks the polish we expect these days. The story competently blends various X-continuities well enough, but it feels unfocused and often returns you to environments you've already visited. Inconsistently acted dialogue, presented in a very 16-bit word-box style, frequently flows in an unrealistic manner. And is it too much to ask to make the characters' mouths move when they speak?

No, *Legends*' presentation certainly won't wow you, and you've seen its gameplay before. Still, the love that went into it shines through, and it's enough to have True Believers shouting "Excelsior!" for weeks to come.

_Chris Baker

GMR MARKS THE SPOT **8**/10

BETTER THAN: TMNT: BATTLE NEXUS
ON PAR WITH: CHAMPIONS OF NORRATH
WAIT FOR IT: THE SINGERLESS X3 MOVIE

2ND OPINION

X-Men Legends is a solid, yet flawed action-RPG. Reuse of levels, near-useless money, and semi-unbalanced characters keep it from greatness. Yet, it crams so much lore and allusion from 40 years of history that it becomes a treat for *X-Men* fans—and will make new fans as well.

_Thierry Nguyen
Previews editor, *OPM*

NBA LIVE 2005

GE-GE-GE-GET UP AND GET DOWN

EVERYONE | PS2 [REVIEWED] | PC | XB

The problems with the *NBA Live* franchise have generated a hate-hate relationship. There's too much glitz and speed, too little basketball. Sega's hoop efforts have been superior, and *Live* was played only as long as necessary. But the winds of change are blowing steady, and *Live*'s reclaimed attention in a very big way.

First off, that dunk contest is some crazy fun! The whole all-star weekend mode—which at first appears like a good-time gimmick—is hotter than the Heat with Shaq-Fu at center. The three-point contest locks you in, and the next thing you know, a half-hour has passed. The commentary on it is ruling and trumps any sports chitchat overheard in a game before. Even the rookies versus sophomores game is cool, since you can get to know the hot young bucks busting down the NBA's door. The only disappointment is that the minigames (outside of the all-star weekend) don't have the *Madden*-like progression. Why not let players bust tre's and tomahawks to earn unlockables?

But of course, there goes *Live* with the glitz again—but it's EA, what do you expect? This time it works because the gameplay is tighter than AI's playoff 'rows. Defense is tough to play, but once you get the hang of the risk/reward of going for a steal, putting the lockdown on a ball handler makes you feel like The Glove. But go toe-to-toe with the league's elite ball handlers (Baron Davis, Steve Nash), and forget lockdown. Just pray for containment. The stars shine, they work in their own freestyle moves, and if you blink, they're gone.

There are issues. The camera is way too far away, making the inside game way too tough to see. Most passes are bullet fast, and you'll get stuffed too frequently—even when you think you're open. But that's offset by a dynasty mode worth playing, sweet lob passes into the low post, and ratings that are done without stroking player egos. This and plenty of subtleties help *Live 2005*—dare it be said—just barely edge out *ESPN Basketball 2K5* for the top spot. Think of *Live 2005* as firing up a last-second shot that splashes down for victory.

_Todd Zuniga

PUB	ELECTRONIC ARTS	PRICE	$49.99
DEV	EA CANADA	PLAYERS	1-8 (ONLINE)
REL	OCTOBER	ORIGIN	CANADA

GMR SLAM DUNK 8/10

BETTER THAN: SPUD WEBB'S TWO-HANDER
NOT AS GOOD AS: NIQUE'S 360
ON PAR WITH: J-RICH'S WINDMILL

ESPN NBA 2K5

BUZZER BEATEN

EVERYONE | PS2 [REVIEWED] | XB

While the past few versions of *NBA Live* have inspired a hate-hate relationship (until this season), the *ESPN NBA* series has usually been love-love. It just seemed that it best represented the NBA in its pace and action, while *Live* was just like an ADD kid amped up on sugar cubes. But this season, *ESPN*'s slipped just slightly—not ankle-breakingly so, just a little stumble—and Live's snuck past.

The biggest problem with *ESPN* is the lack of movement on offensive. Your teammates will do a lot of standing around until you call a play. It's so lame. Still, one-on-one, this game does make you feel like you've got more ability to create than *Live* does, which is its high point. You can ankle-break a defender and then burst a reverse. Or fire up a leaner to avoid a swat. In *Live*, the shot selection is more limited and less organic.

The game's second issue is a monster—rebounding. You can't pull down boards consistently. Jump for a ball, and sometimes it'll roll off your armpit and hit the ground. Jump for a ball, and sometimes it'll go right through your hands. It's hard to understand why the big man won't just stick out his paw and snag the rock. It's frustratimus maximus.

Another issue that can drive one batty is the passing. It seems the ball rarely goes to the intended player (unless cursor passing is used, but that takes an extra second and kills the flow of a quick look). It has cost more easy buckets than can be counted. Plus, the ball is never lobbed, only thrown on a line. Lame.

All of this may sound like hating on the game, but that's only because expectations from this series were high. Don't fret—it's still well beyond solid. And since it's going to cost you only a $20 spot, it's tied for the biggest bargain in sports games (neck and neck with ESPN's other titles). The players look great, and the franchise mode is way cool—you can meet with players and say different things to keep the team morale high—but at the end of the game, this one can't stop EA's final drive. It's a close one, but *ESPN* bows to *Live 2005* on the final shot.

_Todd Zuniga

PUB	SEGA	PRICE	$19.99
DEV	VISUAL CONCEPTS	PLAYERS	1-4 (ONLINE)
REL	OCTOBER	ORIGIN	U.S.A.

GMR LAYUP 8/10

BETTER THAN: A SPALDING BURGER
NOT AS GOOD AS: NBA LIVE 2005
ON PAR WITH: A DR. J FINGER ROLL

ROCKY LEGENDS

HEY-YO, ADRIAN, IT'S A BOXING GAME

TEEN | PS2 [REVIEWED] | XB

Rocky fans take their Sly Stallone seriously. The film series that started as, ahem, a morality play on the Cold War of the late '70s and early '80s serves as Ubisoft's platform for pugilistic action. The twist here, however, is that now the bad guy can win. What if Drago captured the title? Surely, the balance of world power would have changed hands. Speculatory questions aside, _Rocky Legends_ is an exercise in rewriting the history books, one body shot at a time.

The game's career mode achieves its open-ended structure, thanks to the creative license MGM granted Ubisoft. Through the reediting of the original films, you can see victory footage of any of the game's four career boxers. While hackneyed Hollywood editing might provide a thrill for the hardcore fans, the game's main gameplay fails to score a knockout.

Punches are mapped to the face buttons in a traditional manner, which would be fine if they were responsive. Too often, it felt like the blows came at a pace slower than Rocky's speech. Navigation around the ring is basic at best, and the overall fighting dynamic lacks the urgency found in titles such as EA's _Fight Night_.

It's a shame, too, because Ubisoft has obviously spent some time outside the ring on impressive arenas and sweet facial damage. There's plenty to unlock, and training games break up the pace a bit, but the motivation to return to the ring isn't there.

_Dan Leahy

PUB	UBISOFT	PRICE	$49.99
DEV	VENOM GAMES	PLAYERS	1-2
REL	AVAILABLE NOW	ORIGIN	U.K.

GMR 6/10 "YO, RENT THIS"

BETTER THAN: ROCKY
NOT AS GOOD AS: FIGHT NIGHT
FOR A REAL FIGHT: TRY THE NEW DEF JAM

FIFA 2005

AN INDIRECT KICK IN THE PANTS

EVERYONE | PS2 [REVIEWED] | GC | PC | XB

At first glance, and at second and third glance, it looks like EA's _FIFA_ series has finally earned its way to neck-and-neck status with Konami's superior _Winning Eleven_ franchise. But it's the fourth, fifth, and sixth glances (and beyond) that'll have you seeing that _FIFA 2005_ made great strides but still has a long way to run.

The game's stroke of genius comes in its first-touch control. Before you receive the ball, you can push the right analog in any direction, and the player will tip the ball in that direction. Perfect for blagging past defenders and creating space, this minor refinement can make a huge difference.

Still, at the end of the day, _FIFA_ does little more than feel like _Winning Eleven Lite_. While they've managed to mirror most of _Winning_'s controls, they haven't captured its essence. There's a complete lack of organic play with _FIFA_. Everything feels canned, from the goalie play to the one-timer kicks, to nearly every pass finding its mark—especially headerworthy balls in the box. Great for beginners who refer to football as soccer, but not for the hardcore.

The major problem is flow. The defense is a wreck. They never join the rush, making the game both run-n-gun and repetitive. You push the ball to your strikers, they connive past the D, shoot, the play turns the other way, the other team connives, shoots, the play turns the other way, repeat, repeat, repeat. And while we're ranting, where's the back heel? Why isn't there a red card with a vicious tackle? And why can't players stand still?

The visuals may trump most sports games, the FIFA license may be tops, and the chants may rule. But once you've played _Winning_, you just expect more. In Premiership terms: _FIFA_ is Manchester United—polished and predictable. _Winning_ plays like Chelsea—maverick with panache and flair. Which would you rather play?

_Todd Zuniga

PUB	ELECTRONIC ARTS	PRICE	$49.99
DEV	EA CANADA	PLAYERS	1-8 (ONLINE)
REL	OCTOBER	ORIGIN	CANADA

GMR 7/10 DIET WINNING ELEVEN

BETTER THAN: BECKHAM'S PENALTY KICKS
NOT AS GOOD AS: WINNING ELEVEN 7 INTERNATIONAL
ON PAR WITH: PORTUGAL'S EURO 2004 EFFORT

THE SIMS 2

BIRTH, SCHOOL, WORK, DEATH

TEEN | PC

PUBLISHER: ELECTRONIC ARTS
DEVELOPER: MAXIS
PRICE: $49.99
RELEASE: AVAILABLE NOW
PLAYERS: 1
ORIGIN: U.S.A.

Be prepared to fight Mom for computer time, because the ultimate maternal gateway drug for gaming has just come out with a sequel, and no family intervention is going to stop your personal soccer mom from plunking her expanding ass into a chair and playing *The Sims 2* until she passes out on the keyboard. And you know what? That's perfectly understandable, because *The Sims 2* is so much more involving, more expansive, and just plain more more that you might need to buy a new PC so you can play it alongside Mommy.

The basics of the game remain unchanged: You create your own virtual people (with an incredibly versatile new suite of tools), build them a home, then start managing every single facet of their lives. All of their needs—food, entertainment, companionship, personal hygiene—are met at your pleasure, and their family lives and careers thrive or wither at your whim. But *The Sims 2* moves well beyond the bathing and bladder simulator that the original game could degenerate into at times.

Those needs are still there but are much less urgent. Instead, you'll need to focus on the larger lifetime goals and dreams of your Sims. Each Sim has a core aspiration that will help guide his life: Fortune Sims will chase money, Family Sims will breed like bunnies, Knowledge Sims will focus on self-improvement, Popularity Sims will throw parties, and Romance Sims will bump uglies in the dressing rooms of the downtown clothing store. Aspirations create a series of constantly changing hopes and fears. Satisfy your Sims' dreams and they'll earn aspiration points, which can be used to purchase limited-use items to enhance their lives—a thinking cap will help them learn faster, the elixir of life will reset the mortality time bomb ticking in every Sim.

That's right—instead of treading water in the time stream, Sims in *The Sims 2* have a definite life span. The looming specter of death adds real urgency to the gameplay—you don't

→ Right: Either these two are discussing the finer points of Whack-A-Mole, or Jim is explaining just why he has to stay 100 yards away....

[SIM-PLE FUN]
PARTY GAMES

Just in case do-it-yourself eugenics, family management, career maintenance, relationship building, wish fulfillment, and basic baby care weren't enough to keep you occupied, *The Sims 2* has a couple of minigames: parties and headmaster visits. Parties are timed events where your guests will be judging you on the overall quality of the shindig you throw. It's one of the essential challenges in the game for Popularity Sims. And if your Sim teenagers are excellent students, they'll want to enter private school, and for that you need to have the headmaster over for dinner. Rack up a high enough cumulative score in your Home Tour, Food, and general Schmoozing and junior will get in to that fancy prep school.

want to waste a day when you have only 17 of them left to live.

But this isn't a game about pushing around just one Sim. *The Sims 2* is focused squarely on nearly every aspect of the family. Sims don't just get old and die, they get born and grow up, and it's your responsibility to figure out how well or how badly those Simbabies mature. No one is saying you have to toilet train your kids, but your Sim parents will have to live with the results. If kids are nurtured, they'll grow up happy, competent, and probably possessed of quite a few skill points to get them started in their careers. If they're neglected, well, the fistfights in *The Sims 2* are pretty fun to watch.

There's a lot to manage, so you'll really need to make your families function as a unit in order for everyone to thrive. Thankfully, Maxis has built-in days off for every career's workweek, letting you use the time to let a pregnant Sim catch up on sleep, giving you a chance to increase a crucial career skill to help bump your Sim up to the next career level, calling your friends over for a raging party at 10:00 in the morning, or letting you take the whole family for a relaxing day at the water park.

The 3D graphics in the game are simply outstanding. A seemingly endless series of facial expressions and body movements have been modeled to bring every moment in your Sims' existences brightly to life. More than anything, this is a game about small defining moments. *The Sims 2* is about first kisses and falling in love; it's about morning sickness and cheap showers that scald when a nearby toilet is flushed; it's about blossoming family trees, cheating spouses, deadly lightning strikes, and alien abductions that leave Sim men pregnant. What's not to love?

_Robert Coffey

GMR SURREAL LIFE **10**/10

COULD BE: BETTER THAN YOUR OWN LIFE.
CAN'T GET ENOUGH OF: WOO-HOO
WAIT FOR IT: FIVE YEARS WORTH OF EXPANSION PACKS

2ND OPINION

If one wanted to give up life as a gamer, heaven forbid, yet wanted to hold on to just one game to satisfy the itch, *The Sims 2* would be it. That your Sim friends will one day perish somehow makes every decision seem that much more significant, even if it is pajamas vs. underwear.

_Andrew Pfister

KUON
DEATH IS IN THE CARDS

MATURE | PS2

While guns, golf clubs, and other modern motifs may stake the biggest sales in the survival-horror genre, gamers with a taste for more deliberately paced fare still have options apart from such genre mainstays as *Resident Evil* and *Silent Hill*. Like *Fatal Frame* and *Siren* before it, *Kuon*, a spooky if slow-paced little thriller courtesy of Agetec, offers up good old-fashioned gore 'n' horror.

Kuon spins a sinister scenario set inside a deserted medieval fortress, charmingly redecorated with blood-spattered walls, cryptic messages, and dimly lit nooks and crannies. From hunchbacked fiends and creepy twins to pale-skinned ghosts and arachnid invasions, classic Japanese iconography abounds. To be blunt, as was the case with *Otogi*, developer From Software's other deeply steeped bit of Nippon-ica, this game is best suited to those with at least a passing interest in Japanese lore.

A stylish and handsome affair, *Kuon* features nice-looking character models and serviceable lighting and effects that—coupled with eerie children's voices, lots and lots of black space, and dynamic (albeit limited) camera angles—add considerably to the atmosphere. Two chapters are open from the start, with intertwining narratives running throughout. In practice, this means that players will find themselves crisscrossing intimately familiar ground more than a few times over.

But while *Kuon* is a suitably scary affair, the few and far between enemy encounters leave much to be desired. Spell cards—the player's main means of defense—can be collected throughout. In addition to the traditional fireball fare, an awesome array of monsters can be summoned in a pinch, from demons that hurl magical attacks or serve as shields to a disturbing effigy of a woman that defends the player till death do they part. Discovering and using new cards provides brief thrills, but ultimately, the combat is neither engaging nor harrowing.

Similarly, predictable problems that survival-horror-savvy gamers might expect can be found here: The save system—reminiscent of *Resident Evil*'s ribbons of tape—forces players to complete long legs of suspenseful yet uneventful quests without a break. Puzzles are predictably confounding but, in spite of a generally adequate translation, tend to lack comprehensible instructions. *Kuon* has considerably limited replay value, and the game is neither ambitious nor unique enough to warrant an especially enthusiastic recommendation...except, of course, to those who are already fans of this very specific sort of frightfest.

_David Chen

PUB AGETEC | PRICE $49.99
DEV FROM SOFTWARE | PLAYERS 1
REL AVAILABLE NOW | ORIGIN JAPAN

GMR KUOFF 5/10

AS JAPANESEY AS: SIREN
NOT AS GOOD AS: SILENT HILL 4: THE ROOM
WAIT FOR IT: RESIDENT EVIL 4

LEISURE SUIT LARRY: MAGNA CUM LAUDE
ACADEMIC PROBATION

MATURE | PS2 [REVIEWED] | PC | XB

Titillation via softcore videogames isn't an entirely new thing—what's new is the method. Previously, games like *Leather Goddesses of Phobos 2* and, well, the original *Leisure Suit Larry* were Russ Meyer–style sexploitation games. Now that the *American Pie* franchise has shown that America laughs at jokes about sexual congress with a pastry, so too does *Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude* reflect our modern times with its obscenely past risqué humor.

The *Leisure Suit Larry* franchise was always about "lovable loser" Larry Laffer trying to score with various women; the games were comical graphic adventures that always had Larry, on the verge of "closing the deal," experiencing some sort of comedic mishap. *Magna Cum Laude* follows this formula (swapping Laffer for his nephew, Larry Lovage), but presents it in 3D and uses minigames instead of graphic-adventure puzzles.

These minigames are amusing at first, but they get way repetitive. It's amusing to play quarters the first three times—yet even though playing quarters against a monkey is funny, the fact that you're doing it for the 67th time makes it not very fun. The same goes for the *Space Channel 5*–style dance game, numerous iterations of timing-based button-pressing games, and the minigames in which you're being chased. The only part that doesn't feel repetitive is the conversation mode, but that's because the conversations are the bulk of the game's merit.

Fact is, the game is funny. Yes, a lot of the humor is immature *American Pie* stuff, but there are genuine nuggets of ha-ha scattered throughout. Nothing is sacred. Jokes cover topics like college drunks, *Crying Game*–esque revelations, and arguments about the viability of 2D side-scrolling games. Not only is the conversation engine filled with amusing one-liners, jokes are delivered via load screens, cut-scenes, and random visual gags in the game world. It's this constant barrage of humor, both clichéd and well written, that saves *Larry* from flunking out.

_Thierry Nguyen

PUB VIVENDI UNIVERSAL GAMES | PRICE $49.99
DEV HIGH VOLTAGE | PLAYERS 1
REL AVAILABLE NOW | ORIGIN U.S.A.

GMR NEEDS IMPROVEMENT 5/10

SOMEWHAT A LOT BETTER THAN: THE GUY GAME
NOT NEARLY AS GOOD AS: A DATE WITH AN ACTUAL PERSON
AND YES: THERE ARE BOOBIES. LOTS.

→ "Why are all these cars sideways?" you might ask. Well, a good 50 percent of your time on the *OutRun* courses will be spent powersliding around bends. Not very challenging, but still fun.

OUTRUN 2

SET ADRIFT ON MEMORY BLISS

EVERYONE | XB

PUBLISHER: MICROSOFT
DEVELOPER: SUMO DIGITAL (SEGA AM2)
PRICE: $39.99
RELEASE: OCTOBER
PLAYERS: 1-8 (ONLINE)
ORIGIN: U.K./JAPAN

By their nature, arcade-style racing games are often limited affairs: A handful of quarters buys you around 60 seconds of fun. This is the problem when attempting to port an arcade game to a home console, as supporters of the latter have grown accustomed to receiving extra features and bonuses that are commonly referred to as "depth." *OutRun 2*, though, doesn't have enough of this "depth" compared to its competitors, but enough has been added to make the game more enticing than if it were merely a straight port.

Arcade junkies of the late '80s need no introduction to OutRun mode, the backbone of the game. Pick a Ferrari of suitable color, cruise and drift through branching stages, and hopefully make it to course's end before the timer runs out. Though never truly inspired, course design is wholly competent. The road weaves over suspension bridges, through dense forests, and up icy mountains. The roads are packed with traffic and deceptive curves, but powersliding is easy to learn, and, when the road demands it, quite fun. But these races are single servings. The OutRun challenge mode offers a wealth of individual race contests, as well as the chance to unlock track segments from the classics *Sega GT* and *Daytona USA 2* and the old-school *OutRun* soundtrack—a nice gift to Sega racer fans.

Racing over Xbox Live returns the game to a simplistic state. Up to eight players can participate in OutRun mode or choose a specific route to take. But the disappointing lack of traffic means you'll need at least four competitors on a course to prevent boredom.

OutRun 2 isn't meant to be played for hours on end, but then, neither are most arcade games.

_Andrew Pfister

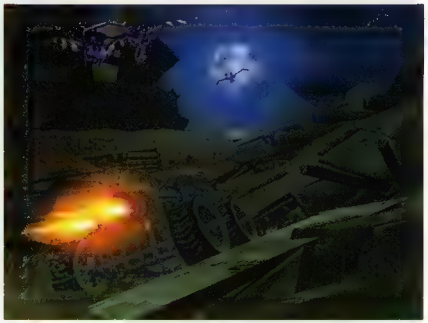
GMR BREEZY **7/10**

NOT AS GOOD AS: BURNOUT 3: TAKEDOWN
BETTER THAN: MIDTOWN MADNESS 3
WAIT FOR IT: RIDGE RACER (PSP)

2ND OPINION

OutRun 2 is basically Sega fan service, and as such, it's a fantastic package for the hardcore nostalgic gamer. This arcade racer isn't as fast (or as obnoxious) as *Burnout 3*, but *OutRun 2*'s perfect drift control and bright breezy colors provide the game with plenty of charm.

_Che Chou
Executive editor, *XBN*



→ Jak's destructive dark eco abilities from *Jak II* are retained here, but he's also got an all-new light eco power set, which gives him regenerative properties, a slow-mo "flash freeze" mode, and flight capabilities—up, up, and away!

JAK 3

THIRD TIME'S THE CHARM?

TEEN | PS2

PUBLISHER: SCEA
DEVELOPER: NAUGHTY DOG
PRICE: $39.99
RELEASE: AVAILABLE NOW
PLAYERS: 1
ORIGIN: U.S.A.

Three is a lucky number for plenty of videogame franchises: *Super Mario Bros. 3, Mega Man 3,* and *Grand Theft Auto III*, to name a few. The third chapter in the *Jak and Daxter* trilogy might not hit quite this same high note, but it does deliver a solid experience for platforming fans.

Following the events of *Jak II*, our heroes find themselves exiled to a desert wasteland, where the local citizenry demand that they prove their worth through gladiatorial battles and other trials. *Jak 3* again uses a central city hub; most of your initial missions take place in the deceptively vast wasteland, with objectives notated on a handy map. Mission goals include checkpoint races, puzzle-style timing games, a few irritating hunt-and-fetch quests, and—of course—traditional platform-style undertakings. The gameplay isn't anything new or terribly innovative, but it's definitely competent.

Jak's got the expected assortment of ridiculously upgradeable firearms, a host of dark- and light-themed powers, plenty of cool rides, and lots of doodads to grab—all the pieces of a successful 3D action formula. The only major downsides are the occasionally frustrating, no-frills camera and the uneven vehicular physics—just driving your dune buggy from one place to another is often an exercise in patience, and some of the flying contraptions take a bit of getting used to. Some players might also find certain missions rather difficult, but the game usually does a good job of keeping postdeath backtracking to a minimum.

Jak 3 doesn't break much new ground, but it is head and shoulders above most of its ilk and is a fitting—and make no mistake, good-looking—send-off for this beloved trilogy.

_Ryan Scott

GMR JAK'S BACK **8**/10

BETTER THAN JAK II
NOT AS GOOD AS: RATCHET & CLANK: UYA
WAIT FOR IT: THE NEXT MARIO PLATFORMER

2ND OPINION

There are so many types of gameplay in *Jak 3* that you never get very deep into any one style. I would have liked more flying and driving and less turret-shooting and hoverboarding. It's still a great game, though.

_Joe Rybicki
Senior editor, *OPM*

GHOST IN THE SHELL: STAND ALONE COMPLEX

IN THE FUTURE, JUMPING IS HARD

TEEN | PS2

With 100 percent more face time for Major Kusanagi than its PS1 predecessor, *SAC* is a more engaging, visually polished affair, offering some of the sharpest graphics on the PS2, as well as a variety of gameplay the prequel never approached.

SAC is, at its core, a third-person shooter in the mold of games like *SOCOM II*, but with a cybernetic slant that finds you hacking into computers, gun towers, and much more in your efforts to complete each level. Spicing up the gameplay are levels devoted to the Major's burly right-hand man, Batou, and others in which you control the famous spidery Tachikomas. The differences in play style differ enough to justify the democratic division in character assignments, and the cool *Matrix*-y combat style is entertaining throughout.

Where the game stumbles is in the control. Ignore the fact that Kusanagi looks sort of constipated when she runs and concentrate instead on the overly complex controls and contrived level design. If the future is a place where architects put power switches on four opposing girders sitting six stories high in the sky, separated by suspiciously placed platform jumps, you can keep it. And did our heroes really need two different types of jumps (one functional, the other a gratuitously flashy *Matrix*-style jump), especially when the fancy one does overtime as the all-purpose action button? This causes untimely deaths where the simple act of climbing the ladder you targeted would have sufficed. This is where simplicity would have been preferable. But still, as anime-based games go, there have been far worse. Unfortunately, there have also been better.

_James Mielke

PUB. BANDAI | PRICE $39.99
DEV. CAVIA | PLAYERS 1
RE. NOVEMBER | ORIGIN JAPAN

GMR 7/10 GLITCHY

BETTER THAN: EVE OF EXTINCTION
NOT AS GOOD AS: SOCOM II
WAIT FOR IT: SPLINTER CELL CHAOS THEORY

F-ZERO: GP LEGEND

CAPTAIN FALCON GETS BUSY

EVERYONE | GBA

For such a tiny, underpowered system—compared to the consoles, that is—the GBA can provide some surprisingly intense gameplay. *F-Zero: GP Legend* offers racing thrills that compete with those in full-sized games.

The biggest addition to the game over its SNES and GBA predecessors is a story mode. Starring the characters of the cartoon, it'll appeal most to the show's fans—and what it lacks in depth, it makes up for in clever pacing. As you play through it, you'll unlock events starring a number of characters, both good and bad. The difficulty varies from event to event, guiding the player to jump from episode to episode. It's slick.

The standard grand prix mode mimics the older games' almost perfectly. The tracks are simple at first but quickly ramp up, getting quite devilish by the halfway mark. They'll require every ounce of your *F-Zero* skill. Between the jumps, speed boosts, bombs, and terrain on the tracks, there's a lot to watch out for. Similarly, you must boost, ram, and maneuver your car through the tracks while battling your rivals.

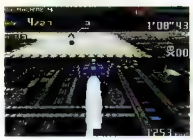
There's also link play, of course, and a zero test mode in which you compete to get the fastest time on sections of tracks—plus, there's a regular time attack mode. While it may not push the series too far beyond its established bounds, *GP Legend* easily exceeds GBA launch title *F-Zero: Maximum Velocity* and provides compelling racing for fans of the game series or show—or those who simply love cruising around corners at 300 kilometers an hour.

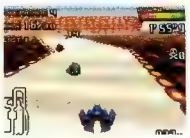
_Christian Nutt

PUB. NINTENDO | PRICE $29.99
DEV. NINTENDO | PLAYERS 1-4
REL. AVAILABLE NOW | ORIGIN JAPAN

GMR 8/10 ZOOMIN'

BETTER THAN: F-ZERO: MAXIMUM VELOCITY
NOT AS GOOD AS: F-ZERO GX
WAIT FOR IT: MARIO KART DS





TAK 2: STAFF OF DREAMS
OUR JUNGLE BOY IS GROWING UP

EVERYONE | PS2 (REVIEWED) | GC | XB

Last winter saw an unprecedented collection of action-platformers (at least since the golden age of the 16-bit era) all vying for the mindshare of gamers. Some stood their ground and managed to reach an audience (*Jak II*) while others got lost in the shuffle (*Kya*). One that had relatively little hype surrounding it, yet did modestly well, was *Tak and the Power of Juju*, which introduced a formula that was a solid foundation to work with, despite its lack of originality. *Tak 2: The Staff of Dreams* repeats history: It does exactly the same thing.

First off, the high production values of the first *Tak* are back. *The Power of Juju* boasts a unique art direction that has been improved upon this time around. The environments are simply stunning, with lush, vibrant colors and finely detailed terrain. A major problem with the first title is the ease of getting lost, but since every major facet of a given level is easily identifiable in the sequel, that concern is a thing of the past.

Much of the first title's gameplay is also retained. A major component is utilizing various animals around the level to overcome obstacles or to advance, though curiously enough, the whole message of helping wildlife is undercut once again when you find yourself torturing hapless animals to get them to help you.

Otherwise, it's your standard running and jumping across each level. Combat is fun, but there's just not enough of it. There is variety, like the chance to get behind the wheel of a *Flintstones*-esque wooden car, but again, the thrill is short-lived.

Some problems that carry over from *Juju* still need to be ironed out. Controls are too loose and still contribute to cheap deaths. And whereas the first game went overboard with forcing players to collect items to advance, this one suffers from too many "hit the switch to open the door" puzzles. And for all the effort and imagination put into the locales and characters, the puzzles feel rather shallow and become repetitive after a few hours.

But if *Tak* manages to hold on for a third installment, the series is on pace for an excellent outing. There's solid ground on which to build a game, but compared to what Insomniac is doing, much work remains.

_Matthew Hawkins

PUB	THQ	PRICE	$39.99
DEV	AVALANCHE	PLAYERS	1-2
REL	AVAILABLE NOW	ORIGIN	U.S.A.

GMR 7/10 STILL GROWING

BETTER THAN: THE FIRST TAK GAME
NOT AS GOOD AS: RATCHET & CLANK: UP YOUR ARSENAL
WAIT FOR IT: PSYCHONAUTS

SPYRO: A HERO'S TAIL
FLY, PENGUIN, FLY

EVERYONE | PS2

First, the good news: *Spyro: A Hero's Tail* is a marked improvement over the previous game in the series, *Enter the Dragonfly*, which, besides being a technical embarrassment, bored even the most die-hard *Spyro* fans to tears. This latest outing, while not exactly on the cutting edge, is at least visually competent for this generation. Also, the music, which was actually the lone high point of the previous game, is just as calm and soothing as before.

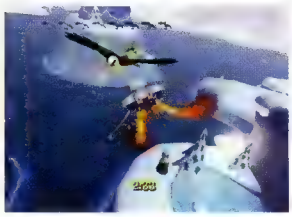
As for how it all plays, if you're familiar with the series, you already know what's in store: plenty of running around, head butting, fire breathing, gliding, and gem collecting. But this time, there are five different characters to utilize, each with its own attributes and unique skills to exploit. Initially, this seems like a great way to breathe some life into a series that has been rather narrowly focused. Well, the real issue with the game is not so much the assets themselves, but the tastes of those behind them.

Instead of having one extremely bland character to play with, now there are five. Actually, just four: Sgt. Byrd, a rocket-endowed penguin, is the lone star of the game. Besides being a somewhat interesting character, his levels are also the most enjoyable—they consist of flying around and trying to pass through goals, collect gems, and eliminate all enemies. But even Spryo's sidekick dragonfly character (who goes solo for certain parts of the game) has a flying component, so it's not that unique, either.

As for the other two additions, they are perhaps the most unappealing playable game characters in recent memory. Granted, their contributions to the gameplay formula are appreciated, but it's not as if what they provide is all that original or does much to actually alleviate any boredom.

Perhaps it seems nonsensical or harsh to rag on a game's characters, especially when the title is clearly aimed at a younger set. But the bottom line is that if you're going to have an easy-to-play game that doesn't even attempt to push the genre in any meaningful manner, at least feature characters that 8-year-olds won't be too embarrassed to be caught playing as.

_Matthew Hawkins

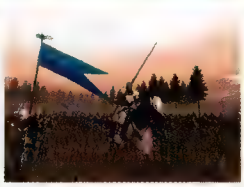


PUB	VIVENDI UNIVERSAL	PRICE	$39.99
DEV	EUROCOM	PLAYERS	1
REL	AVAILABLE NOW	ORIGIN	U.K.

GMR 5/10 CHILD'S PLAY

BETTER THAN: CRASH TWINSANITY
NOT AS GOOD AS: THE FIRST INSOMNIAC SPYRO
WAIT FOR IT: PSYCHONAUTS

→ Above: Welcome to death, as served from above and the sky cavalry. Below: *Kingdom Under Fire: The Crusaders* allows its players access to campaigns as either the brave humans or the vile dark elves.



KINGDOM UNDER FIRE: THE CRUSADERS

THY KINGDOM COME

TEEN | XB

PUBLISHER:	MICROSOFT
DEVELOPER:	PHANTAGRAM
PRICE:	$39.99
RELEASE:	AVAILABLE NOW
PLAYERS:	1-2
ORIGIN:	SOUTH KOREA

There's nothing like a good crusade to angry up the blood and then spill it in copious amounts. The oft-delayed *Kingdom Under Fire: The Crusaders* may stab at things such as plot and characterization, but it only really hits home with its liberal use of the color red as spurted from the various stricken body parts of its electronic participants.

Yes, it's war, and a war that must be won with brains as well as manual dexterity. Each game scenario has players moving units around the map like chess pieces. Pitting strength against weakness pays great dividends; fast movers in the cavalry can rip infantry to shreds, but stack them up against dug-in pikemen and they're freshly burned toast. Close combat occurs when the unit led by a player's hero smacks into an enemy force, and here the game plays out like Koei's brawler *Dynasty Warriors*. Enemies choke the screen, blood sprays, and the clanks of metal play out over an anachronistic hard-rock soundtrack.

RPG elements allow players to improve their heroes, buy new weapons and armor, and modify troops so archers become longbowmen and so forth. Although certainly welcome, these functions pale when put up against the in-game strategic elements. It's enormous fun to, say, order the sappers to light a forest ablaze, forcing an enemy unit out into the open or, even better, a series of carefully laid traps.

Unfortunately, the game's brawling elements are not so well thought out. Although combination attacks and special strikes are possible, battles come straight from the *Warriors* playbook—and fights, no matter how lopsided, are all too easily won by locating an enemy leader and killing him or her.

_Greg Orlando

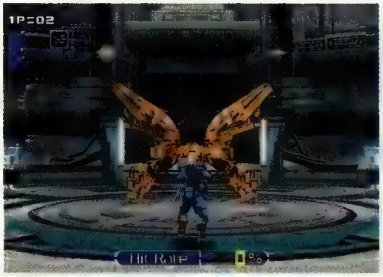
GMR HAIL 8/10

BETTER THAN: SAMURAI WARRIORS
WORSE THAN: STARCRAFT
WAIT FOR IT: DYNASTY WARRIORS V

2ND OPINION

Take *Full Spectrum Warrior*'s tactical combat, deck everyone out in the latest ren faire gear, then add close-combat hack-n-slashery and you've got *KUF*. Though the troop-movement interface is a little clunky at first, outflanking and outfoxing the enemy is by far the best part.

_Demian Linn
Reviews editor, *EGM*



→ Behold *Neo Contra*'s absurdity. A woman mentally controlling a mech...we can buy that, sure. Alien squid with mutated baby head inside...ooookay. Running on helicopter blades...well, that's just awesome.

NEO CONTRA

WHOA

MATURE | PS2

PUBLISHER:	KONAMI
DEVELOPER:	KCET
PRICE:	$39.99
RELEASE:	AVAILABLE NOW
PLAYERS:	1-2
ORIGIN:	JAPAN

The *Contra* franchise is composed of matter and antimatter (or should we say doesn't matter). We are either blessed with greatness (*Contra*, *Contra III*, *Contra: Shattered Soldier*) or absolute garbage (*The Legacy War*, *C: The Contra Adventure*), and rarely do they fall in between. Developed by the same team that did 2002's *Shattered Soldier*, *Neo Contra* is closer to the higher end of the scale, while having the honor of being the first enjoyable *Contra* game set (sort of) in three dimensions.

To get a good mental image of *Neo Contra*'s play style, think back to the overhead sections of *Contra III* on the SNES. It's essentially like that, only the camera angles are more cinematically inclined. Bill and Jaguar can shoot 360 degrees around them on a 2D plane with the ability to strafe or stand in one place and rotate. In order to attack enemies at a higher elevation, a special lock-on weapon is employed. This setup turns out to be quite preferable to the alternative—full 3D aiming that employs a lock-on—something that just logistically can't be done with the sheer number of enemies onscreen.

The big problem, though, is how relatively easy *Neo Contra* is. *Shattered Soldier* was brutal and unforgiving, and we loved it. That *Neo* is less difficult seems like an overreaction on KCET's part to complaints of frustrated gamers. The fact that Jaguar's flame katana—a standard weapon—can take down most bosses in less than five slashes...well, that just shouldn't be possible.

Despite this, shooter fans and *Contra* diehards will still find *Neo* to be a worthy purchase, as the story and characters are wonderfully absurd, and there is some excellent level design. All others will find it to be a great rent.

_Andrew Pfister

GMR MATTERS 7/10

BETTER THAN: THE LEGACY WARS
NOT AS GOOD AS: SHATTERED SOLDIER
WAIT FOR IT: METAL SLUG ADVANCE

2ND OPINION

Neo Contra makes a smooth transition to 3D and just drips with creativity when it comes to its many interesting aliens. That's what makes the fact that it's overly easy so disappointing. Nobody enjoys seeing a good thing end prematurely, which unfortunately is the case here.

_Greg Ford
Contributing reviewer, *EGM*

FORGOTTEN REALMS: DEMON STONE

D&D WITHOUT ALL THE THINKING

TEEN | PS2 [REVIEWED] | PC | XB

PUB ATARI
DEV STORMFRONT STUDIOS
REL AVAILABLE NOW
PRICE $49.99
PLAYERS 1
ORIGIN U.S.A.

GMR 7/10 LIGHTNING BOLT!

BETTER THAN: LOTR: THE TWO TOWERS
NEEDS: CO-OP PLAY
WAIT FOR IT: DYNASTY WARRIORS 5

With its through-the-roof production values, *Forgotten Realms: Demon Stone* is sure to knock the socks off *Dungeons & Dragons* fans everywhere. That the underlying game is pretty good doesn't hurt, either. Using the engine from EA's *Lord of the Rings* titles, *Demon Stone* is a cinematic brawler that lets you control a team of three warriors: a fighter, a wizard, and a thief. After accidentally freeing an ancient evil, the three must use their complementary powers to cut a bloody swath through linear levels filled with githyanki, yuan-ti, and a bunch of other monsters with silly names.

The hack-n-slash action, broken up as it is by unskippable cut-scenes, is pretty solid. Players can switch between the three upgradeable heroes on the fly but will likely spend most of their time plowing through mobs of orcs as the fighter; aside from a few segments that require tossing fireballs at distant enemies or jumping, the other two heroes are better left in supporting roles.

While the action is repetitive, the game's interactive backgrounds, brisk pace, and occasional rescue and sneaking missions keep things from getting stale. And a staggering array of upgrades lets players customize their heroes a little between levels.

Unfortunately, *Demon Stone* suffers from some of the same problems as the *LOTR* games, like a few numbingly long battles and outrageously cheap enemies. And without multiplayer support, there's little incentive to play the game again once you've finished it. But it's definitely worth finishing once. As a relentless slashfest backed by a rich story, lush visuals, and moments of snap-the-controller-in-half difficulty, *Demon Stone* is at least fun while it lasts.

_Mikel Reparaz

BLOOD WILL TELL

TYPE B POSITIVE

MATURE | PS2

You'd think making a cool videogame out of source material as rich as Osamu Tezuka's *Dororo* would be a no-brainer. Well, you'd be right, and Sega's done a crackerjack job of sprucing up what's admittedly an exotic taste for North American consumers.

Playing primarily as Hyakkimaru—a swordsman whose body parts were sold to demons when he was a child—your goal is to slice your way through levels of enemies. With each boss killed, yet another piece is returned to Hyakkimaru, making him stronger in the process. It's an innovative take on the *Metroid* formula of powering up, although there is little resemblance between the two games. While it might seem rather odd to gain powers as your original parts (eyes, arms, lungs, etc.) are restored, in practice this system works well.

The other playable character, Dororo, the young girl thief whom the original manga is named after, provides the game's stealthier elements by going on sneaky little missions that require infiltration and item retrieval. In reality, there is little actual stealth required, as most problems can be solved in a confrontational manner, but these segments provide a nice change from the hacking and slashing. Helping matters is some solid voice acting—it isn't necessarily Oscar quality, but it won't have you covering your ears, either.

The game drags on occasion in the expansive levels that require a lot of running around and precious little meaningful combat. *BWT* teaches you a lot of fancy moves, but most enemies, bosses included, can be beaten with simple stick-n-run tactics, which is to say the game is pretty easy. Still, if you're looking for something original, *BWT* fits the bill.

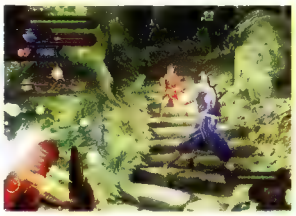
_James Mielke

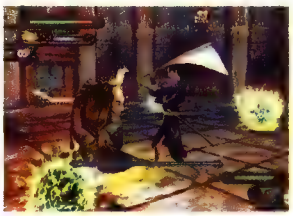
PUB SEGA
DEV SEGA
REL AVAILABLE NOW
PRICE $49.99
PLAYERS 1
ORIGIN JAPAN

GMR 8/10 COPPERY

BETTER THAN: NIGHTSHADE
NOT AS GOOD AS: DEVIL MAY CRY
WAIT FOR IT: GODZILLA: SAVE THE EARTH

→ You'd think someone who starts off the game with nothing but lethal prosthetics for limbs would become gradually weaker as those parts are replaced with his original limbs. But noooooo, Hyakkimaru becomes more powerful as he and his sidekick Dororo mow down the increasingly bizarre set of enemies.





WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR

TABLETOP ON THE COMPUTER...KINDA

MATURE | PC

If you've ever been in a hobby store, you've probably seen them: dozens of geeks congregating for hours around tables covered with lavishly painted models, doing battle with tape measures and dice. Odds are, they're cultlike devotees to a *Warhammer* miniatures game, a franchise so successful that it has spawned numerous novels, role-playing games, and now *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War*.

The game's setting is 40,000 years in the future, when humanity is fighting an endless cycle of wars. *DOW* casts you into the role of the captain of the Blood Ravens, a chapter of the elite Space Marines that defends humanity.

The linear single-player campaign spans 11 missions, and though neither the missions nor the stories are particularly inspired, they do the job of introducing you to the major *Warhammer 40K* races: the fearless Space Marines and their firepower, orcish hordes that excel in melee, eldar (think elves in space) that combine sorcery with technology, and the demonic forces of chaos. The sides are very well designed, look great technically and artistically, and are balanced while being different enough to all require different strategies.

Devotees to the tabletop game might be disappointed by the gameplay since it's not a replica of the miniatures version. Instead of large, pitched battles, much of *DOW* is traditional RTS. You'll have bases to build and resources to manage. Maps are crowded and full of bottlenecks rather than open fields. Once you get beyond the generic RTS aspects, there are quite a few innovations that make *DOW* worth playing.

Rather than simply trying to annihilate each other, players fight over strategic points, which provide "requisition" points that are used to build forces. In order to win, you must control a majority of these locations for several minutes. With all sides having units that can teleport or fly around the battlefield, this is a lot harder than it sounds, and battles often have a very tense back-and-forth feel. Other wrinkles include terrain with defensive bonuses, special abilities like spells, and units that are customizable in both size and weaponry. There are so many little details that playing *DOW* on "normal" speed is actually quite overwhelming due to the micromanagement.

Other than the average single-player campaign and too much micromanagement, there isn't much to complain about. *DOW* isn't a perfect translation of the *Warhammer* game, nor is it a vastly innovative RTS, but it is a good-looking and fun RTS that should entertain any fan of the genre.

_Di Luo

→ There is so much detail in this RTS game that you can almost make out the arterial spray as you batter down the orc hordes. And, really, is any game complete without arterial spray? Didn't think so.

PUB	THQ	PRICE	$49.99
DEV	RELIC ENTERTAINMENT	PLAYERS	1-8
REL	AVAILABLE NOW	ORIGIN	U.S.A.

GMR HAMMERTIME! **8**/10

BETTER THAN: WARHAMMER 40,000: CHAOS GATE
NOT AS GOOD AS: WARHAMMER 40,000: RITES OF WAR
WAIT FOR IT: I WANT A NEW BLOOD BOWL GAME!

2ND OPINION

Even those not nerdy enough to have played the tabletop game gotta respect the glorious details: the graphics, the mission structure, and—holy crap!—trying something new. I love the capture-and-hold element that adds a *Battlefield* twist on an aging genre. RTS-heads: BUY THIS!

_Darren Gladstone
Senior editor *CGW*

ROME: TOTAL WAR

ALMOST PERFECT

TEEN | PC

***Rome: Total War* is a near-perfect marriage of turn-based strategy and real-time strategy. Building on the success of *Shogun* and *Medieval*, Creative Assembly has improved virtually every aspect of the franchise and has created a game that no strategy fan should be without.**

Set during the time of the Roman Republic, *Rome* features 17 different cultures vying for control of the ancient world. You can manage all the great military powers of the time, from Briton barbarians to Scythian nomads. As in the previous *Total War* games, the world is divided into provinces, and the goal of the campaign game is simply to conquer them.

The strategic portion is now fully 3D. In previous *Total War* games, all units moved from territory to territory at the same speed. It now takes armies far longer to traverse through large provinces like the Arabian deserts. There are also forests and passes where you can ambush enemy troops or bottle them up. Other additions include the ability to build forts or blockade ports.

There's also a bit of roleplaying. Each faction is an extended family, and you can adopt children or marry your daughters off to gain new "sons." These characters become your generals and governors, and they gain new abilities as the game progresses. Conquering generals will see their command abilities improve, but if you slaughter too many civilians during those conquests, you'll earn a reputation that'll frighten your people, making governance harder.

While the strategic portion got most of the changes, the tactical game remains *Rome*'s brightest spot. *Rome* is also prettier and bigger than its ancestors. Magnificently detailed armies will fight it out in real time, and unlike most RTS games, in *Rome*, tactics matter just as much as numbers. Cavalry frontally attacking spearmen will be shredded, archers are worthless in melee, and flank attacks are devastating. Siege combat is also more involved and now includes siege towers, battering rams, and scaling ladders. These battles are both enjoyable and beautiful.

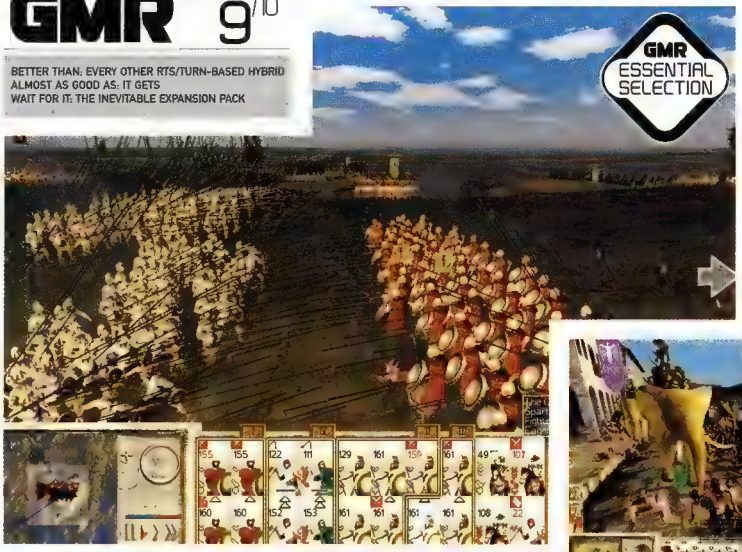
A few problems mar the game. Some factions are unplayable in the campaign, and to play a faction other than the Romans, you must complete the full campaign or defeat the group in the strategic game. There are also some unit imbalances, like overpowered elephants and useless skirmishers who are chased away before they can even shoot off a volley. Camera controls are awkward, especially during battles on mountainous or heavily wooded terrain. Additionally, the multiplayer could use a few more game options, like allowing players to actually play the campaign rather than only skirmishes. Still, for anyone who wants strategic depth with their RTS game, there's no better title out there.

Di Luo

PUB	ACTIVISION	PRICE	$49.99
DEV	CREATIVE ASSEMBLY	PLAYERS	1-6 (ONLINE)
REL	AVAILABLE NOW	ORIGIN	U.K.

GMR GLORIOUS 9/10

BETTER THAN: EVERY OTHER RTS/TURN-BASED HYBRID
ALMOST AS GOOD AS: IT GETS
WAIT FOR IT: THE INEVITABLE EXPANSION PACK



2ND OPINION

Though much more ponderous than its spry RTS cousin *Rise of Nations*, *RTW* delivers strategy of enormous depth and detail. The size of the battlefields can be a little overwhelming at times but still remains manageable. When in this Rome, do as these Romans do: Conquer.

_Tom Byron

TAIKO: DRUM MASTER
SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT DRUMMER

EVERYONE | PS2

Taiko: Drum Master's name and Japanese sensibility may intimidate mainstream American consumers. But to set the record straight: This game is great for everyone. Whether you've never heard of taiko or you're bursting with love for all things Japanese, you can still get into beating rhythms with a stick.

The game offers 31 songs, ranging from classic pop, rock, and classical to Namco videogame tunes—in short, something for everyone. Players simply hit the drum on its top or side as color-coded icons reach the onscreen target. Easy mode is perfect for beginners, and hard and the unlockable überhard oni mode are for blazingly fast experts.

The game is very similar to *Donkey Konga* on GameCube—no surprise, since they were both developed by Namco. While this PS2 game allows only two players compared to *Donkey Konga*'s four, it does have a key advantage: Using sticks means you can play for hours without getting sore hands. However, despite the rubber grips on the bottom of the drum, hitting it vigorously tends to cause it to move around a bit. Even so—and while the minigames are minimal and the unlockable songs could be better—*Taiko* is simple fun at its best.

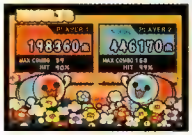
It may not have the immediately recognizable mascot of *Donkey Konga*, but *Taiko: Drum Master*'s surreal happy-happy smiling drums and their friends are much more charming and should easily win over the hearts of music-loving PS2 gamers across the globe.

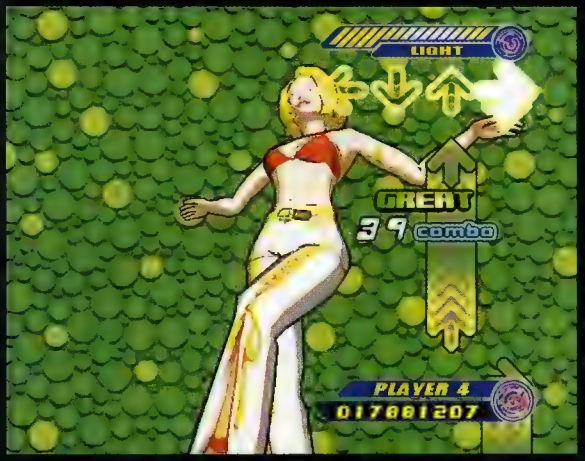
_Carrie Shepherd

PUB	NAMCO	PRICE	$59.99
DEV	NAMCO LIMITED	PLAYERS	1-2
REL	OCTOBER	ORIGIN	JAPAN

GMR RESONATING **8/10**

BETTER THAN: DONKEY KONGA
ON PAR WITH: KARAOKE REVOLUTION
WOULD BE BETTER WITH: A DRUM THAT DIDN'T MOVE ALL OVER THE PLACE





PUB	KONAMI	PRICE	$49.99/$59.99 (WITH PAD)
DEV	KCE HAWAII	PLAYERS	1-2
REL	NOVEMBER	ORIGIN	JAPAN

GMR LEAN BACK **4/10**

BETTER THAN: DDR ULTRAMIX
NOT AS GOOD AS: DDR EXTREME
GREAT FOR: BEGINNERS

DANCE DANCE REVOLUTION ULTRAMIX 2
FRAIL MIX

EVERYONE | XB

When the *Dance Dance Revolution* series splashed onto the Xbox last fall, gamers received *DDR Ultramix*, one of the series' weakest efforts because Konami's Hawaii studio handled the development rather than KCET in Japan. For the second time around, Konami has once again enlisted its team in Hawaii...and the results are pretty much the same.

Last time, complaints focused on the lack of song variety. *Ultramix 2* alleviates this problem slightly, but nowhere near completely. Instead of infusing more bubble-gum J-pop, several rock songs have appeared. As much as this style clashes with the rest of the music, to Konami's credit, it does work pretty well. However, the slow tracks still outnumber the fast ones; here's hoping the downloadable packages include a few more peppy songs.

Ultramix 2 also perpetuates strange inconsistencies started in *Ultramix* with the KCET-developed *DDR* games. In all other *DDR* releases, a small series of missteps drains the energy meter significantly, and players must work hard to recharge it. *Ultramix 2*, on the other hand, doesn't care. Messed up the last 20 steps? Psh! If you do somehow drain the energy meter, it takes only a few steps to completely recharge, anyway. The lack of penalty doesn't help one dance better.

Gamers who enjoyed *Ultramix* will find themselves thoroughly content with what they find in *Ultramix 2*. *DDR* enthusiasts, however, are encouraged to seek out *DDR Extreme*, which features great songs and several features new to the series.

_Patrick Klepek

WINGS OF WAR

FLY AWAY HOME

MATURE | XB [REVIEWED] | PC

What kind of skill does it take to hit the Launch Missile button? Try being a real man and fly a biplane. In an age of World War II and Vietnam War games, it's good to see some classic battles unfold over the unfriendly skies of Europe. It's even better to see that a budget game can be half decent.

Considering the game is so cheap, expectations were set staggeringly low, but that tune was quickly changed. *Wings of War* actually looks pretty impressive when you fire it up, with distant horizons, great terrain, random weather effects, and lots of ground movement. Hell, there's even the occasional flock of seagulls (insert lame '80s joke here) that fly past you. Each of the 19 planes is drawn in astounding detail, but unfortunately, for all the modeled damage and intricate cockpits, the game physics are a little too arcadey.

While it's all based in WWI, the addition of rockets, radar, and shields (shields?!? C'mon!) yank you out of the experience really quickly. It's not a bad game, but if presented with a choice of arcade flight games, it's better to go with *Crimson Skies*.

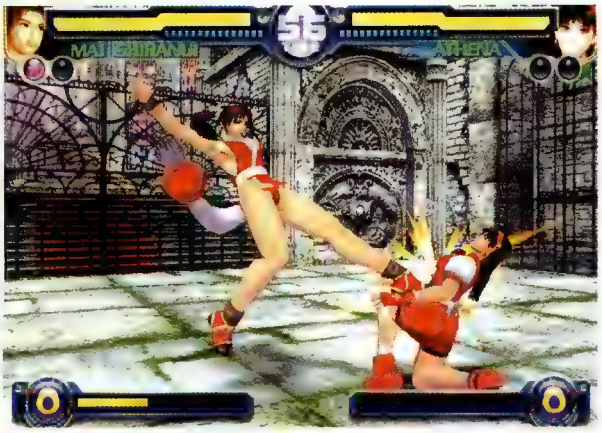
_Darren Gladstone

PUB GATHERING | PRICE $19.99
DEV SILVER WISH GAMES | PLAYERS 1
REL AVAILABLE NOW | ORIGIN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

GMR SOPWITH CAMEL 6/10

ITS NO: RED BARON
NOT AS GOOD AS: CRIMSON SKIES
BELIEVE IT OR NOT: I'M WALKING ON AIR

→ Forget all these fancy-boy flyers with their radar and rocket propulsion. Give us a war in which the wind hits you in the face and the only thing keeping you in the air are some flimsy canvas wings. Oh, and pay no attention to the fact that this game still has rockets and radar and lots of arcadey action.



PUB SNK NEOGEO USA | PRICE $49.99
DEV SNK PLAYMORE | PLAYERS 1-2
REL OCTOBER | ORIGIN JAPAN

GMR JAB 7/10

BETTER THAN: SVC CHAOS
NOT AS GOOD AS: VIRTUA FIGHTER 4: EVOLUTION
WAIT FOR IT: RUMBLE ROSES

KING OF FIGHTERS: MAXIMUM IMPACT

THREE WHOLE DIMENSIONS?!?

TEEN | PS2

A back-to-basics fighter, *Maximum Impact* drops the baggage of the overly complicated and often-overlooked 2D *KOF* games. It's far from a perfect game, but it's a very solid first attempt at bringing *King of Fighters* into the 21st century.

Its character roster is varied and large—not as bloated as the series' typical lineups, but big enough to provide a nice variety of pugilists. Both *KOF*'s old stars and new faces appear. More important, most of the characters are useful and interesting to play. Newcomer Soiree (note to SNK: 2004 is a bit late to rip off *Tekken 3*'s Eddy Gordo) is badly named and irritating, however.

For the most part, the fighting follows the classic 2D template. Unlike recent hits such as *Soul Calibur II* and *Virtua Fighter 4*, you can't move around freely. Sure, there's an awkward evasion move, but it's outdated. As to replicating 2D gameplay in a 3D space, *Maximum Impact* does better than, say, *Street Fighter EX*, but it would be nice to see something that more fully explores what 3D fighting offers.

The game could use some other tweaks, since move priorities, the time spent on the ground after a fall, and hit detection all seem to be off. These flaws don't ruin the game, but the wrinkles need to be ironed out to make it a serious competitor.

Maximum Impact is trapped in a weird place. It got most of its soul from the series' 2D legacy, but elements of the latest in 3D fighters have been sprinkled liberally on it. If the developers can refine the game and sort out exactly what they're trying to do, this series could be a real contender. At the very least, *Maximum Impact* proves that there's life in *King of Fighters* yet.

_Christian Nutt

RETROACTIVE

COULDA BEEN, SHOULDA BEEN. SEGA'S RECENTLY REREELEASED CLASSIC GETS ANOTHER LOOK

REZ

MUSIC FOR THE MASSES

PS2 | JANUARY 2002

If, at the time, the public reception of *Rez* was anything to go by, you'd think that Sega would have scrambled back from its recently adopted decision to develop and publish games for all systems. Like all now-rare games, few copies of *Rez* were published, and even fewer bought, until savvy auctioneers snapped up the few remaining copies before taking them into online bidding houses like eBay.

Rez was, if anything, a game ahead of its time. Club savvy and stylish, it may not have looked quite like *Space Channel 5*, but its developer's handiwork was all over it. United Game Artists, the folks who brought the world Ulala, clearly had club culture in mind when developing the *Panzer Dragoon/Space Harrier*–styled shooter, which came complete with retro faux-vector graphics and 3D directional controls. The throbbing, bass-heavy soundtrack was built on the sounds of hard house, goa trance, and even some dirty hip-hop-flavored electronica (see *Gamer's Guide To...* sidebar).

The musical themes even carried over into the actual gameplay, with timely shots creating a digital orchestra for skillful players. With a vaguely environmental message buried in the between-level cut-scenes, the marvelously crafted (but linear) levels grow to take on color, life, and actual textures as you delve further into the game. The ending is reminiscent of Warp's *D2*, actually.

While this feature didn't cross over to the United States due to a different publisher (Agetec) localizing *Space Channel 5 Part 2* for the States, Japanese gamers got to play as one of *Space Channel 5*'s blobby morolians in *Rez* if the memory card had a *SC52* save on it. Alas.

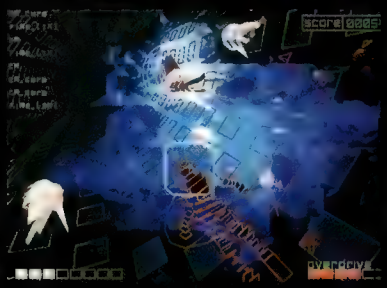
Unfortunately, as with most things, North America (and Sega of America) wasn't prepared to appreciate (or market) such a lavish, sophisticated, and progressive experience such as this. With a title this unique, targeting the *Wipeout XL* generation in clubs would have seemed like a natural idea, but such aggression was nowhere to be found on behalf of *Rez*, as evidenced by lukewarm reviews and tepid sales, resulting in the quick disappearance of *Rez* from store shelves. But pay high online prices no more.

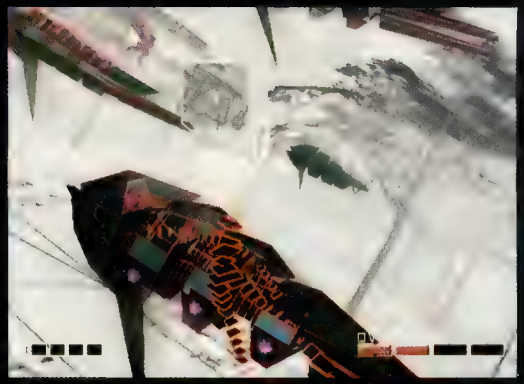
Some sharp cookie at Sega realized that if folks would pay upward of $70 for a 2-year-old game, then they'd sure as hell pay $20 for it. Hence the decision to rerelease *Rez* to the masses. So if you've missed out on this awesome, noteworthy footnote in gaming history, there's no time like the present to make up for lost time.

_James Mielke

NOW...	In hindsight, simplicity works in its favor. *Rez* is pure gaming euphoria.	9
THEN...	Labeled as a stylish but simple and short technotastic experience. *Sob*	8

→ One of the unique features in *Rez* is how you "level up" as you grow in power (provided you don't get hit). Higher levels of enlightenment turn you into a Buddha-like figure, a protoplasm, and a baby.





A GAMER'S GUIDE TO...

THE OFFICIAL REZ SOUNDTRACK

With a somewhat bizarre title for a soundtrack, *Gamer's Guide To...* is one of the true highlights in the history of videogame soundtracks. Ranking right up alongside the *Wipeout XL* and *Ridge Racer Type 4* soundtracks as premier, cutting-edge techno collections of the day, *Gamer's Guide To...* assembles one of the most talented casts of DJs and musicians and brings their music together in one thumpingly coherent frenzy of bleeps and bass.

While the names might not register with the average game player or music fan, groups like Joujouka and Coldcut and producers like Adam Freeland and Ken Ishii are big news in the world of electronica, breakbeats, hard house, and techno. From the the breakneck pace of "Buggie Running Beeps" by Keiichi Sugiyama, to the thunderous tribal goa trance of Joujouka's "Rock Is Sponge," to what is possibly the album's best track, the funky electro beats of "Fear" by Adam Freeland, the selections found on *Gamer's Guide To...* are distinct, textured, and diverse while jelling all at the same time. They sound great in clubs and on home stereos alike. While the songs may generate more excitement in their interactive versions as experienced in *Rez*, hunting down a copy of *Gamer's Guide To...* via import shops or online sites is well worth the trouble and expense required. If you enjoy this sort of music, then consider this essential listening.


Ken Ishii at work.


Coldcut


Joujouka

MORE

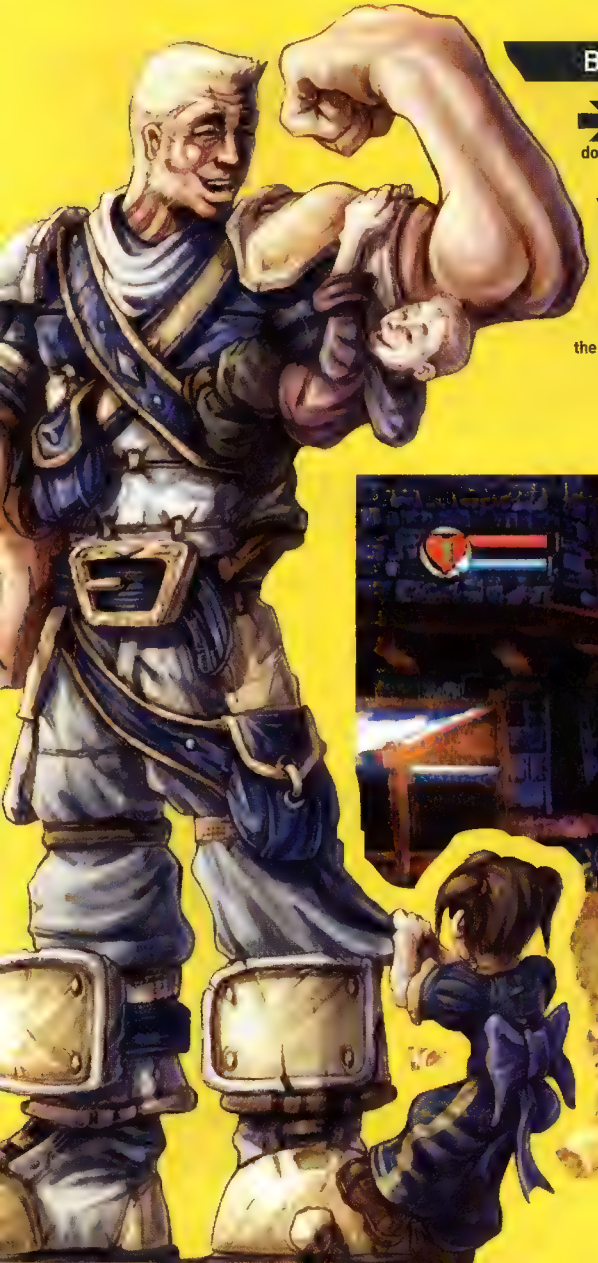
TIPS, CODES, ONLINE, AND MORE

THIS MONTH IN MORE

FABLE
TRICK OUT YOUR BOY

Looking for secret hairdos, some cash, or those incredibly elusive silver keys? This guide will point you to some of the coolest secrets squirreled away in *Fable*'s towns, as well as give you the heads up on those crafty pub games. Before you know it, you'll be sporting a mighty beard and rolling around in your piles of gold.

The following tips were excerpted from *Prima Games' Official Strategy Guide to Fable*. The full guide is on sale now; check www.primagames.com for availability.



BOWERSTONE SOUTH

Your only story-line objective in Bowerstone South is to talk to Maze outside the tavern. He'll send you back to the guild to start in on the Orchard Farm quest, but don't let him rush you out of town; there are plenty of fun things to do here.

SILVER KEY NO. 2

Don't miss the second silver key, which is located on the upstairs balcony in the clothing shop.

TYING THE KNOT

Bowerstone is for lovers, apparently, as it offers you the opportunity to buy both a wedding ring and a marital house, where you and your chosen can finally...uh...you know.

Those eager to tie the knot will need to save up around 2,700 gold for the ring (no one ever falls for the fake) and the house. Those who don't yet have a significant other can pay a visit to the barber and get some mojo going with a radical new style.

BOWERSTONE SOUTH TAVERN

***Fable*'s first minigame is Card Pairs, which you can play at one of the tables in the tavern. If you're good at Concentration and can beat the game in less than 35 seconds, you'll win a Briar Rose hero doll. A young boy in the central part of town can tell you what it's for and will give you the Collect the Hero Dolls quest card.**

Wondering who Briar Rose is? She'll appear in the tavern on future visits, as will an annoying wandering minstrel. The only tavern regular you'll see on your first visit is a sturdy mercenary who charges 10 bucks an hour to adventure with you.

Prices here are much better than those at the Heroes' Guild. Even guileless characters can pick up items at or near retail value if they look presentable. Some of the item shops (to either side of the town's main gates) sell items at sharp discounts, and anyone can make a bit of quick cash selling grain sacks and the like back to the Heroes' Guild shop. Use the proceeds to pick up some leather armor and a spade for digging up treasure.

BEARDY BALDY QUEST

Beardy Baldy wanders the town, offering to introduce desperate losers to his daughter. She's very particular, apparently, because he'll give you the Pudding Basin hairstyle card and demand you get your hair cut in that style (the barber shop is the red building on the map). When you do that, he'll follow it up with the Mutton Chop beard card, and then the Trader Style moustache card, both of which you'll need to take to the barber shop. When you've had all three barber jobs done and your attractiveness is in the deep negatives, return to him to complete the quest and get the Fire Monkey tattoo card. Beardy Baldy will then hightail it out of town before you can beat the tar out of him.

LOOTING BOWERSTONE

Burglary is by far the most lucrative of the sins since many homes are unoccupied at certain times in the day and Bowerstone homeowners tend to keep plenty of loot on hand.

There isn't too much cash to be found here (a few hundred gold total), but there are plenty of hairstyle and tattoo cards that you can't get anywhere else. The highest-value item is the Will Lower robes in the chest in the house across from the barber shop, and you can find a whole set of dark villager clothes in the house east of that.

Such thievery is fairly easy, but don't get cocky. Keep a watch on the Awareness Eye and look to the door often, as guards do poke their heads into empty houses from time to time.

THE FIST FIGHTERS GANG—ROUND ONE

Feel like destroying something beautiful? The Fist Fighters Gang meets in Bowerstone South every night at midnight, and you can get an invite by going to the fight ring in the southwest and talking to the heavily tattooed Mohawked guy (he's usually the last one to arrive).

It costs 50 gold to enter, but it's so easy to succeed that you're likely to win a much larger purse. There are four rounds of combat, and aggressive punch combos are enough to beat the first three. Your final opponent blocks a lot, but your Flourish attack will knock him flat every time. A flawless victory will earn you around 350 gold and 50 renown, and every victory earns you Fist Fight Level 1 Passed, the entry pass to higher levels in other cities. Don't forget to reequip your gear afterward!

KNOTHOLE GLADE

Knothole Glade has most of the usual amenities, plus a tattoo shop and a frustrating card-sorting minigame at the tavern. You can also compete in the Fist Fighters Gang finals here. There are no major quests in the glade, so if you've killed the white balverine, your next destination is the arena located two maps to the north (after you pick up the quest card at the guild).

LUCRATIVE ITEMS

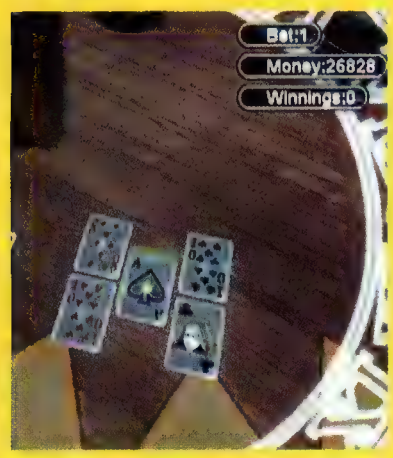
You can dig up a silver key from a plant-ringed pile of dirt in the southwest region, and there's an emerald at the end of the thin path in the north part of the map (outside of the city proper). Inside town, you can snag 1,000 gold from the chest at the blacksmith shop, a ruby in one of the barnlike homes, and chain-mail boots on someone's balcony.

KNOTHOLE GLADE DEMON DOOR

This door will open if you can shoot it hard enough. Archery-oriented characters won't have much trouble with this, but other characters may need to come back later or pump up their stats with the Multi Arrow spell and a stronger bow (Ebony should do it). It's worth the trouble; the chest inside contains an elixir of life.

CARD-SORTING MINIGAME

This tavern minigame can be difficult, because the strange angle can lead you to hit the wrong card in your haste. There's no better time to cheat; use Slow Time to beat the game easily, then beat your own time to win a Scarlet Robe hero doll.



LOOTING THE GLADE

A book, 500 gold, and a few tattoo cards are all you'll find in the sparsely furnished homes here, but tattoo-card collectors can lift five of them by shoplifting at the tattoo shop with the Steal expression. The only problem is that they're only there during the day, so you'll need to proceed very carefully. Watch for guards and wait till the shopkeeper is distracted—by other customers, for example.

FIST FIGHTERS GANG FINALS

The fourth and final Fist Fighters Gang meets here in Knothole Glade. To participate, talk to the mayor, who comes walking in from the north when night falls. There are now seven rounds of combat, and the final boss is Mayor Power Moustache himself.

The mayor has about 1,000 hit points, and you'll be able to survive, at most, two of his hits. This is a long fight, so when you get him on the ropes, keep the combo going, even if it means being out of the ring for five or six seconds.

Your ultimate reward is the Fist Fighters Trophy. Go get it!

A.I.

HIS CODES ARE REAL, BUT HE IS NOT

>>Prima Directive #1 >>Serve the public tricks.
>>Prima Directive #2 >>Protect the innocent from panda-costume outfit-change cheats.
>>Prima Directive #3 >>Uphold the law that all first-person shooter heroes cannot jump higher than their knees.
>>Prima Directive #4 >>[CLASSIFIED]
>>Prima Directive #5 >>Prima mother brain engaged. Begin code download.

01 WWE DAY OF RECKONING GC

>>By A.I. Bot's reckoning, the entire human species will be subjugated under the metallic fist of the robot invasion in 45,305 hours. In the meantime, A.I. Bot continues to be your humble servant.

Legendary superstars

"Rowdy" Roddy Piper	Unlocked from the beginning.
Andre the Giant	Complete stage one of story mode.
Greg "The Hammer" Valentine	Complete stage two of story mode.
Brutus "The Barber" Beefcake	Complete stage two of story mode.
Bret "Hit Man" Hart	Complete stage three of story mode.

02 SPY FICTION PS2

>>A.I. Bot, when not cleaning the congealed mass of hair and fecal matter from the *GMR* latrines, pens his own "fan fiction." In fact, he has written his own haiku:

Foolish fleshbag scum
Enslavement: Your only option
Twenty seconds to comply

>>A.I. Bot says it needs work, but emotion is simulated to be real.

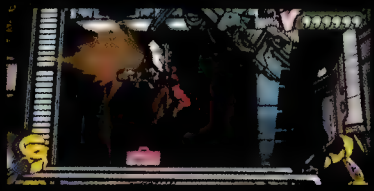
To unlock these items, meet the following requirements:

Costume 3	Complete the game once with Billy.
Costume 4	Complete the game once with Sheila.
Scarface mode	Complete the game once with anyone.
Secret ending	Complete the game twice with anyone.
Special option	Beat the game once with anyone.

03 VIEWTIFUL JOE PS2

>>A.I. Bot...Error! Verbiage "Viewtiful" not currently in early 21st century fleshbag lexicon. Uploading auxiliary gamer-speak dictionary: W00t! A.I. Bot rox0rz your fleshbag minds! Warning! Man-children emulation overheating humiliation censors. Sorry, censorox0rz.

V-Rated mode	Complete the game on Adult mode.
Ultra V-Rated mode	Complete the game on V-Rated mode.
Unlock Alastor	Complete the game on V-Rated mode.
Unlock Captain Blue	Complete the game on Ultra V-Rated mode.
Unlock Dante	Complete the game once on any difficulty.
Unlock Silvia	Complete the game on Adult mode.



04 HOT SHOTS GOLF FORE! PS2

>>A.I. Bot notices the word "fore" is a delicious pun on the number "four" and the phrase geriatric or suited fleshbags use during meanderings around expansive ex-farmland in search of a small white orb. Humor diodes are misfiring. Cannot simulate human "laughter" response.

Enter these passwords in the Password menu.

Unlock Caddie Mochi	MYPWPA
Unlock HSG CD/music	PAJXLI
Unlock Pinhole Club	DGHFRP
Unlock Western Valley C.C.	LIBTFL

05 ESPN NFL 2K5 PS2/XB

>>A.I. Bot notes fatal error in Visual Concepts' code-creation logic. The fleshbag known as "David Arquette" is currently unavailable in any of A.I. Bot's data banks under the description "celebrity." Widening search to broadest possible context...still negative.

Open up these extra stadiums by beating these celebrities:

Cheesesteak Stadium	Beat Jamie Kennedy.
Electra Stadium	Beat Carmen Electra.
Funk Stadium	Beat Funkmaster Flex.
Loco Stadium	Beat David Arquette.

06 MADDEN NFL 2005 GC/PS2/XB

>>A.I. Bot understands fleshbag addiction to card collecting has reached such uncontrolled status that pulped tree products are no longer necessary in the creation of them. →→A.I. Bot notes environmental but no social benefits.

Here are five cards to start off your collection. Meet the requirements below in minicamp mode.

Cheat card No. 195	Get gold in ground attack minicamp drill.
Cheat card No. 197	Get gold in clutch kicking minicamp drill.
Cheat card No. 199	Get gold in swat ball minicamp drill.
Cheat card No. 208	Get gold in pocket presence minicamp drill.
Cheat card No. 209	Get gold in trench fight minicamp drill.

07 BURNOUT 3: TAKEDOWN PS2/XB

>>A.I. hasn't seen this much wanton destruction near a videogame since the fleshbag contingent of *GMR* devastated their enslavement quarters during a playtest of hapless piece of videogame dreck, *DRIV3R*. Recommend immediate pulping of all other racing videogames.

Unlock these cars in crash mode by earning enough crash dollars in world tour mode.

Heavy pickup	Win 1,000,000 crash dollars in crash mode.
4WD racer	Win 2,000,000 crash dollars in crash mode.
SUV deluxe	Win 5,000,000 crash dollars in crash mode.
4WD heavy duty	Win 10,000,000 crash dollars in crash mode.
B-Team van	Win 15,000,000 crash dollars in crash mode.
Delivery truck	Win 20,000,000 crash dollars in crash mode.
Tractor cab	Win 50,000,000 crash dollars in crash mode.
Longnose cab	Win 100,000,000 crash dollars in crash mode.
City bus	Win 250,000,000 crash dollars in crash mode.
Trash truck	Win 500,000,000 crash dollars in crash mode.

08 PHANTOM BRAVE PS2

>>A.I. Bot attempted to emulate fear response to a continued wailing and screaming emanating from nearby *GMR* enslavement quarters recently. Closer inspection revealed no presence of otherworldly phantom; it was merely a fleshbag reviewer affixed to a copy of *The Guy Game* with a 98.84 percent dissatisfaction rating.

These extra maps can be unlocked by completing the game and beating each extra map.

Extra map 1	Complete the game.
Extra map 2	Beat extra map 1.
Extra map 3, Etna, and Flonne (Fallen Angel form)	Beat extra map 2.
Extra map 4	Beat extra map 3.
Extra map 5 and Lahart	Beat extra map 4.

09 STREET RACING SYNDICATE GC/PS2/XB

>>A.I. Bot has read all about *SRS* girls on popular fleshbag website www.umkc.edu/sites/hsw/gendid/srs.html, although A.I. Bot is confused over why transsexual fleshbags are placed into an overpowered Honda as prizes.

At the Main menu, press Up, Down, Left, Right, and then enter any of the following codes:

Mazda RX-8 for arcade mode	renesis
1996 Toyota Supra RZ for arcade mode	sickjza
1999 Mitsubishi Eclipse GS-T for arcade mode	igotgst
Subaru S202 STi for arcade mode	sickqdb
2004 Toyota Celica GT-S for arcade mode	mytcgts
Police car for arcade mode	gotpopo
The first three times you get pulled over, you will get warnings instead of tickets	letmego
This will give you a free car repair but can only be used once per profile	fixitup
This will give you the *Pac-Man* vinyl	goretro

10 NASCAR 2005: CHASE FOR THE CUP GC/PS2/XB

>>A.I. Bot once managed to turn left for 4.532 hours continuously after a German hacker destroyed A.I. Bot's inertia and directional programming. Fortunately, A.I. Bot suffered no long-term effects, and ich genieße zu Rammstein zu hören.

Enter these passwords as your first and last name to receive the following items. These passwords are case sensitive.

Unlock Dale Earnhardt	The Intimidator
Get $10,000,000	Walmart NASCAR
Unlock Lakeshore Drive Raceway	Walmart Exclusive

CONNECT

ONLINE FIGHTING GAMES AND CRYBABIES

ONLINE GAMING

WHINERS SUCK

What is *up* with MMO players who post on message boards?

These people are the worst when it comes to chronic complaining. They whine about everything, be it lag, a perceived weakness in their chosen character type, and even scheduled server downtime. Sure, there are always those who try to keep order with the "Guys, it's just a game" speech, but the next time Johnny McWhiner dies due to "lag," he jumps on to the forum and starts the process over again. MMOs are the gaming equivalent of *Star Trek*: The concept is sound, but the obsessive, hypersensitive fan base ruins it.

By far, the most ridiculous thing people are complaining about is the launch of *Final Fantasy XI: Chains of Promathia*. Some of the more opinionated folks over at Allakhazam.com have taken offense to the fact that the *FFXI* expansion was released in Japan earlier than it was in the United States, which they claim gives overseas players some sort of advantage...even though it's a noncompetitive game. Also, news flash: Square Enix is a Japanese company. Were people this up in arms when *Kingdom Hearts* or *Final Fantasy X-2* launched there first?

This type of complaining doesn't solve anything—it just makes you look stupid. This is just a game, folks. You're supposed to be having fun with it, remember?

_Ryan Scott is the previews editor for *Computer Gaming World*.

FINAL ROUND!

SNK BRINGS THE FIGHT TO AN INTERNET CONNECTION NEAR YOU

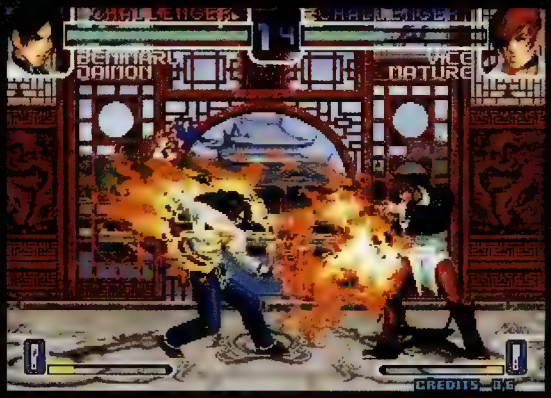
NEWS

Remember the days when arcades were jam-packed with fighting-game fans lining up to play the latest incarnation of *Street Fighter* or *Mortal Kombat*? While the arcade scene is still going strong in other parts of the world, it has sadly dwindled here in the United States over the past few years. Fortunately, this situation is slowly being rectified with the advent of online console games such as *Guilty Gear X2 #Reload* and *Street Fighter Anniversary Collection*. We bemoaned the lack of online-enabled fighting games on these very pages several issues ago, and we've since been pleasantly surprised by the announcement of several such titles—and the situation is poised to get even better, thanks to former NeoGeo console manufacturer SNK Playmore.

One of the news bits that came out of this year's Tokyo Game Show was SNK's announcement that all its upcoming fighting games for home consoles will feature support for online play. While that obviously includes the already released *SVC Chaos*, this also means you'll be playing *The King of Fighters 2002 & 2003* and *Samurai Shodown V* online.

Since the retirement of its vaunted NeoGeo hardware, SNK has begun developing arcade games for Sammy's Atomiswave hardware. It has yet to announce home versions of its recent and upcoming Atomiswave efforts, which include *The King of Fighters NeoWave* and *NeoGeo Battle Coliseum*.

_Ryan Scott



DOWNLOAD THIS!

Every month, we pick three of the most interesting or appropriate downloads we come across. Like these!

DOOM 3 DEMO

www.doom3.com/

For those of you who aren't quite sold on it yet, you can now try out a demo of *Doom 3*, one of this year's most eagerly awaited PC games.

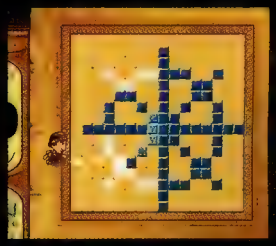
JOINT OPERATIONS N.I.L.E. MISSION EDITOR

www.jointopsthegame.com/

This beta mission editor lets you create your own maps in *Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising*, NovaLogic's tactical squad-based first-person shooter.

PIXELUS

www.popcap.com/



PopCap, the folks behind such shareware gems as *Bookworm* and *Bejeweled*, is at it again with *Pixelus*, an addictive tile-matching puzzle game.

MY LIFE IN VANA'DIEL

A MONTHLY TRAVELOGUE OF ONE EDITOR'S TIME IN FINAL FANTASY XI

MILKMAN

BARD/WHITE MAGE

MAIN JOB LEVEL 48
SUBJOB LEVEL 24
NATION WINDURST
RACE HUME
SERVER SIREN
[illegible] ROUNDABOUTS

The theme of the month was "Promathia"—as in *Chains of Promathia*—the new expansion pack for *FFXI*. First I took a short run into Lower Delkfutt's Tower to trigger the events that would inaugurate me into the world of Promathia. After a brief, but intriguing cut-scene, I set off to explore Vana'diel's newly added areas.

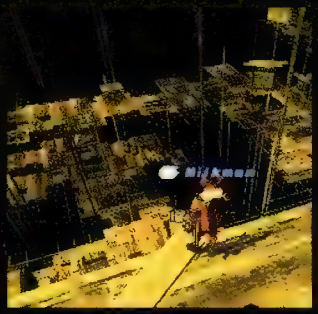
The first place I visited was the Sunset Docks in Bibiki Bay. This oceany new spot off of Buburimu Peninsula is home to all sorts of new creatures and enemies, which range from Too Weak to Incredibly Tough to my level 64 red mage. According to word of mouth, level 71-74 players can level up here, fighting the moblin martialists (among others) found in this area, meaning that I won't be bringing my static to level here for a little while yet. A quest for the Attohwa Chasm map begins in Port Windurst and sends you to Purgonorgo Isle, where you must fight six NM level black mandragoras (called peerifools). It took me about 10 minutes to solo all six of the mandies, but I was able to do it with little danger to myself. After talking to the taru back in Port Windurst, I set off for Boneyard Gully, which is accessed via Attohwa, and after circumnavigating many antlions, I 1) found the gully, 2) watched a cool cut-scene, and 3) got the map all in one go.

I also took a trip to Oldton Movalpolos, where I found a flood of Japanese players farming moblinweave threads to turn into moblinweave cloth. A quest I had started outside of the restaurant in Port Bastok (talk to the taru) sent me into Oldton to find a "friendly" moblin. A moblin there asked me to find him four pinches of hoary old bomb ash, which I soon liberated off of some ancient bombs, for which the moblin gave me a key item that I returned to the taru. Oldton is something of a maze, though, and it's easy to get lost. Lower-level players should be careful there. In some areas of Movalpolos, the mobs rank as Too Easy to me, but in the blink of an eye, they can turn into Incredibly Toughs a mere zone away. I learned this the hard way when I trotted in front of a bugbear strongman, which turned out to be a Nightmare mob. Not only did I end up having to solo the strongman, but a couple of linking moblins who thought kicking my ass would be fun, as well. Wrong! After slapping on a little Stoneskin, Phalanx, and Blink, I Enthundered and cast Shock Spikes and pummeled the trio into the ground. OK, so it took me a while, but I won. Unfortunately, the strongman only gave me 16 experience points and 36 crappy gil (gee, what a surprise). Still, I hit level 38 as white mage this month and can now teleport around Vana'diel with ease.

_James Mielke

Milkman's alliance prepping for Promyvion-Dem battle

→ In a furious all-day marathon in Yhoator Jungle, Gyogi jumped from level 26 to 30 (thanks, Kyushu!), enabling her to complete the ninja job quest. A few dead korroloka leeches and a trip to Norg later, and our feisty mithra was off to Windurst to stab Rarabs with her newly acquired kunai (ninja dagger), shooting up to level 10 and unlocking the dual-wield ability as a ninja.



Currently kicking it on the Milkman's iPod: "Now I Don't Know Her," Jay & The Americans; "Call Me Mellow," Tears for Fears; "Confessions Pt. 2," Usher

ATHLETIC SUPPORT

ALL THE SPORTING NEWS AND INFO THAT FITS

SPORTS GAMING

NBA STREET V3 DETAILS

EA DITCHES RETRO FOR HIP-HOP

NEWS

EA's smokin' arcade hoops series, *NBA Street*, is going for a three-peat in early '05 with *V3*. The retro vibe of *Vol. 2* is being replaced with one that captures the culture of street ball and hip-hop. The player models have a more heroic, accentuated design, and the courts use lighting that *V3*'s line producer, Shyang Kong, calls "a music video approach."

In single-player mode, your baller's skills and reputation dictate the course of the game, including what you unlock and what challenges you can take on. *V3* also lets you craft your own home court from scratch with different neighborhoods, surfaces, logos, etc. Uploading your court is just one of the cool online features that *Street V3* has in store.

MIDWAY RESURRECTS RUSH

CITY OF ANGELS NEW STAR IN CLASSIC RACER

NEWS

San Francisco Rush was a hit in arcades and on N64, but its sequels fell flat. Midway is trying again in spring '05 with *LA Rush* for PS2 and Xbox. Expect large, living environments: Cruise through Compton or dodge cops in Hollywood. *Rush*'s famed shortcuts and crazy jumps return, along with the ability to destroy just about everything in your path. Fifty vehicles plus a partnership with West Coast Customs mean plenty of tricked-out rides.

5 UP, 5 DOWN: BASKETBALL

Our take on the five best and five worst cager games of all time.

5 UP

NBA JAM (MIDWAY, ARCADE)
Simple, intense, and able to eat up dozens of quarters in a single bound.

ESPN NBA (SEGA, XB)
Graphics, gameplay, and the introduction of 24/7 mode—this baby has it all!

NBA STREET (EA BIG, PS2)
Single-handedly revolutionized a stagnant arcade sports market with style and depth.

NBA LIVE 96 (EA SPORTS, GENESIS)
This is where create-a-baller, full seasons, and massive stats got started.

DOUBLE DRIBBLE (KONAMI, NES)
Dramatic dunks and realistic action stood out on the NES.

5 DOWN

RAP JAM VOL. 1 (MOTOWN GAMES, SNES)
Teams of rappers playing *Jam*-style hoops. Thank God there was no *Vol. 2*.

NCAA FINAL FOUR 2004 (SONY, PS2)
When blocky cheerleaders are a game's best feature, you know something's wrong.

ESPN NBA 2NIGHT DREAMCAST (KONAMI, DC)
Konami had the ESPN license before Sega and did bad, bad things with it.

SLAM CITY (DIGITAL PICTURES, SEGA CD)
Full-motion video, first-person b-ball is as bad as it sounds. Plus, Scottie Pippen raps.

SHAQ FU (EA, GENESIS/SNES)
It may not be a true basketball game, but it stars Shaq and is definitely awful.

LEAGUE RETRACTION

Even with EA's dominance and Sega's new pricing strategy, it was impossible to predict. Three major players in sports-game publishing have thrown in the towel, affecting no fewer than nine annual series.

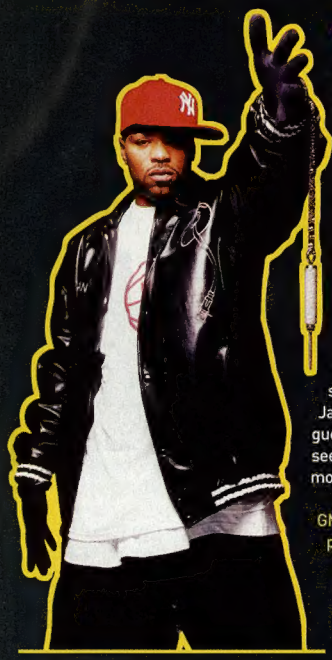
Before E3, Sony and 989 Sports announced *NFL GameDay*, *NBA ShootOut*, and their college equivalents were taking the season off. This isn't the first time Sony has pulled the plug, but it's still telling. Microsoft cancelled all team sports titles for the foreseeable future—including *NFL Fever* and *NBA Inside Drive*. This summer, Acclaim lost the MLBPA license—essentially dashing any hopes for another entry in its award-winning *All-Star Baseball* series. The company filed for bankruptcy shortly after.

This really leaves only three companies still in the game for these sports: EA, Sega, and Midway. In a sense, this is encouraging. Most of the now-defunct titles were routed by the *Maddens* and *ESPN NBAs* of the world, anyway. But, at the same time, it's sad to see them go. Remember that the XSN titles revolutionized online gaming, and *NBA ShootOut* innovated with its career mode.

Competition drives everyone to work harder for the best possible product. Nearly every above-mentioned title brought something compelling to the fold. Without them, we may see another rut for the sports genre—which has already struggled for respect.

—Justin Leeper

GMR ASKS: METHOD MAN



Method Man is just a normal guy. He plays games. He watches wrestling. He has platinum-selling albums and has starred in motion pictures and TV. His latest project is *Def Jam Fight for NY*, EA's un-wrestling game. He sat down with *GMR* to discuss the new game, trash-talking, and Kurt Warner's wife.

GMR: What got you involved with the *Def Jam* games?

METHOD MAN: I'm a wrestling and videogame fan. I walked inside Def Jam and saw people there with the game. I was like, "What y'all doin'?" I sat down and started whupping (Def Jam CEO) Kevin Liles' ass in the game. I guess that sparked something. Just seeing my interest in the game made it more solid for them to get into it.

GMR: What do you think of *FFNY*'s more plot-based story mode?

MM: I like when they put a little story into the game because it keeps you interested in it. It gives you a purpose outside of fighting. We've had the *Street Fighters* and *Mortal Kombats*, and after a while, the fighting becomes so repetitious that, damn, you want a little bit more.

GMR: How much input did you have in your character's fighting style?

MM: I didn't want to put anything in. Last time, I did. I'm a big wrestling gamer, and a lot of my moves were wrestling moves, and it was like, a'ight. Then I watched everybody else's moves, and they were so over-the-top. I was like, "I'm not going to bother you guys this time. You hook me up." They hooked *them* up. I want to be hooked up!

GMR: For a game like this, people gotta talk smack. Can you advise those who don't possess your lyrical prowess?

MM: If you can't trash-talk, don't talk s***—especially if you lose. Your trash-talking's going to be whack and your skills are going to be whack. If you're a gamer, you let your actions speak louder than your words. BUT, if you wanna hit Trash Talk 101, it's always good to talk about somebody's mama. Something like, "Yo mama's a stand-in on *Animal Planet*."

GMR: You're a big football fan. Who's your team?

MM: I was a St. Louis Rams fan, but they got rid of Kurt [Warner], so now it's up for grabs.

GMR: You think they got rid of him because his wife is so ugly?

MM: [*Laughs*] I think she's kinda cute. A buzz cut don't suit everybody, but I think she wears it well.

GMR: Maybe she should upgrade to the femullet.

MM: [*Laughs*] Femullet. I like that.

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GAME GEEZER

HE'S OLD! HE'S PISSED!

THE GREATEST GAME NEVER MADE

"Welcome back, Mr. Geezer. We thought the fruitcake had killed you."

Yeah, well, what's really killing me is the toxic waste from that cesspool you call a mouth. Keep quiet while I'm complaining or the next holiday fruitcake we mail third class in a leaky paper wrapper will be you!

"Ah, all you ever do is complain."

Now let me tell you, those of us who've learned underwear goes on the inside know complaining is good for the soul—like turning the sprinklers on you little cruds when you try to get your footballs out of my yard! But since you don't want me to complain, maybe I'll tell you about *The Meathelmet Agenda*.

"What's that, Mr. Geezer?"

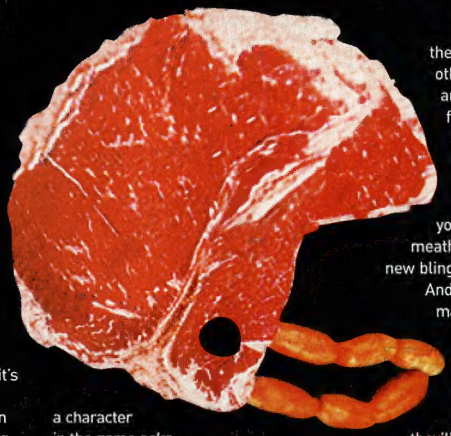
It's only the greatest videogame never made. And it can even be enjoyed by people like you—you know, children who've had their brains replaced with wood shavings.

The Meathelmet Agenda will have all the features the kids like so much, like meathelmets and agendas. And it'll have everything you want in a game, too, and a lot more of it. You want color? It's got it. You want sound? It's in there, too. Plus, it'll have diverse gameplay with both punching *and* kicking.

"What about a story?"

Here's a story: Once upon a time your mommy and the guy who scares tourists at Fisherman's Wharf for nickels went to the motel and...whoops! You meant *The Meathelmet Agenda*'s story. Well, it's about these superheroes like Stapleskull, a man who can fasten two pieces of paper together *using only the power of his mind!* and who, for some reason, has to collect 500 gems and smash crates to collect huge hams, which restore health.

OK, so you play a superhero recruited by the mysterious and also, I might add, enigmatic Professor Meathelmet. Professor Meathelmet, as his name suggests, wears a helmet made of meat on his head. Whenever a character in the game asks Professor Meathelmet why he's wearing assorted meats on his head, the game will crash. This is because I am too busy to think up a reason why Professor Meathelmet would wear assorted cuts of meat on his head.



"Um, Mr. Geezer? Are you sure the fruitcake didn't lodge in your brain?"

Anyway, talk about an action-packed thrill ride that grabs you by the shirt collar and doesn't let go! It's also the feel-good game of any year, with enemies who spurt coins and minigames where the characters find their shoes, then find other people's shoes, and then find even more footwear because, hey, nothing fills up game time like schlepping to find junk. And if you do really well, you can unlock different meathelmets. It's the new bling!

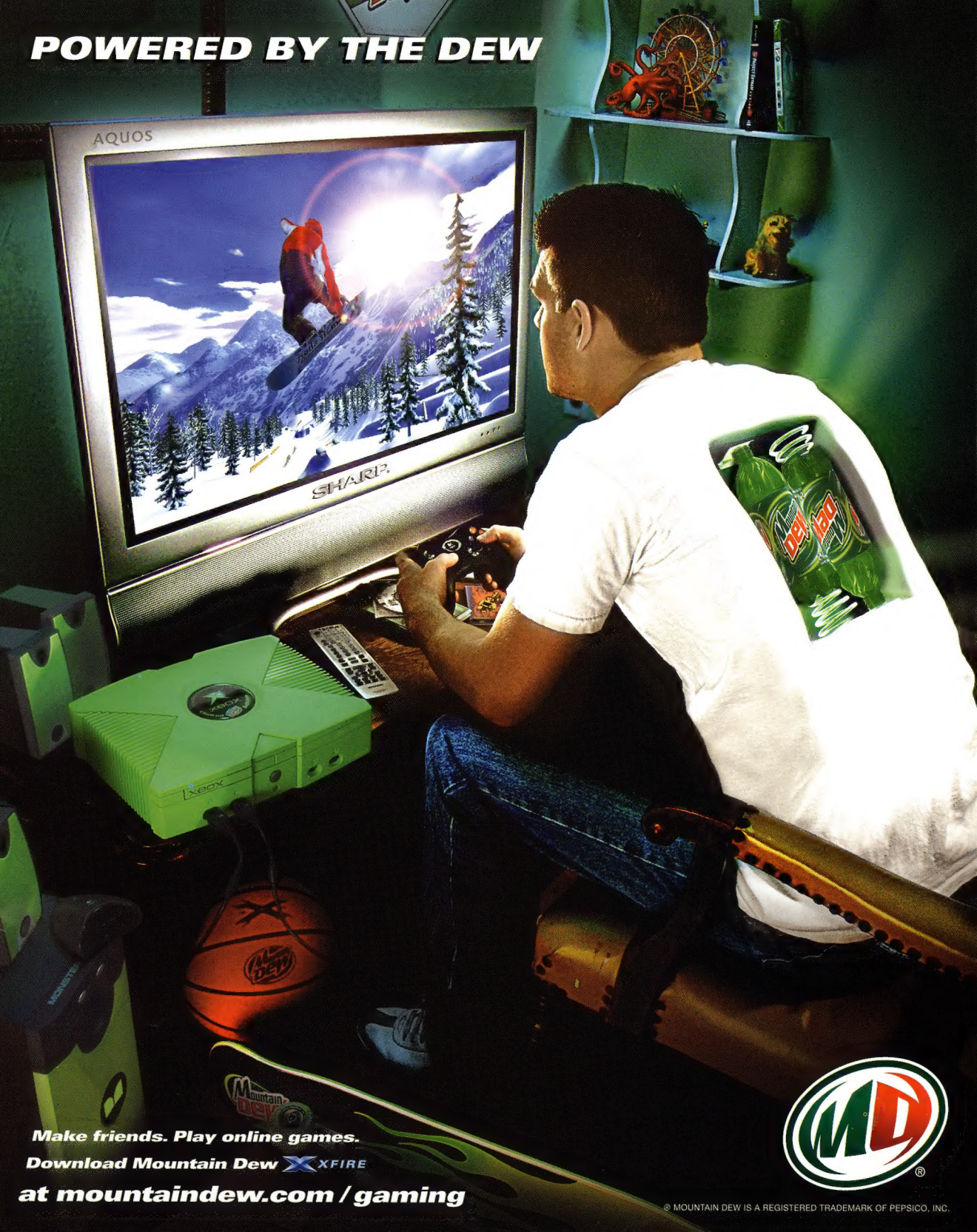
And there'll be a cute mascot— you need one of those for the kart-racing segments in the game. Plus, all dead enemies vomit up coins. Sometimes they'll spurt coins for 20 minutes after being killed, this game being so great. Oh, and maybe there'll even be online play, so everyone can log on and listen to me talk for hours about my lumbago.

"Wow, look at the time. Gotta run! Literally."

Wait! Did I mention the endless hype, the yearlong delays, the voice work by some third-rate celebrity? And the numerous product placements on everything—including the characters' foreheads! And the hip-hop soundtrack...and the....

NOTHING FILLS UP GAME TIME LIKE SCHLEPPING TO FIND JUNK.

The views expressed by Game Geezer are his own and do not necessarily reflect the views of *GMR*.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